MARVEL MASTERWORKS®
THE FANTASTIC FOUR®
VOLUME 20

THE FANTASTIC FOUR Nos. 219-231
& ANNUAL No. 15
DOUG MOENCH & BILL SIENKIEWICZ
WITH JOHN BYRNE

MARVEL

MARVEL MASTERWORKS

PRESENTS

THE Fantastic Four

VOLUME 20

COLLECTING

THE FANTASTIC FOUR Nos. 219-231

& ANNUAL No. 15

DOUG MOENCH • BILL SIENKIEWICZ

WITH JOHN BYRNE

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NOS. 219-231 & ANNUAL NO. 15

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THE BIG-KID STUFF COLD TURKEY FAIL

BY DOUG MOENCH

Maybe it was gritty Chicago, or maybe it was just a self-imposed edict of impatience, but turning 12 felt like high time to grow up. Or to at least change, bracing for some mysterious new phase and form of being. I'd already known the magic of puppy love, but now there was the whiff of something stronger and far more profound in the air. Even the music coming through my transistor radio conveyed a sublime almost-teen confirmation of everything I was feeling. The future was girls, no doubt about it, plus there were sports still to play, a sudden increase in homework along with more involved chores, and less time. Something had to give.

But what could be given up in order to grow up? Not my bike, not yet; I still had to get around for at least four more years before driving became an option. Until then, the bike beat walking and actually saved time. TV had already been drastically cut about a year earlier when I'd doubled my reading time to accommodate more real books in addition to my regular reading.

And that was it, the sacrificial key to saving time and growing up, right there in the towering stack of my long-running regular reading. *Comic books*. I'd been reading the things for as long as I could read, and semi-reading them before that, my head stuffed with the adventures and misadventures of Uncle Scrooge and Donald Duck, Bugs Bunny and Baby Huey, Atomic Mouse and Casper, Sad Sack and Little Lulu, Dennis the Menace and Herbie, Turok and Tarzan and Tomahawk, Batman and Superman and Wonder Woman, even Archie and his gang. I was seriously addicted to these characters, along with many others. They were all old friends, but they were also kid's stuff and it was time to grow up.

So I broke the addiction, just like that. Cold turkey. And somehow I didn't miss my once-beloved comic books one teeny-tiny bit. Time was saved by the gobs as I tackled the business of growing up, newly focused on chores and homework and real books and sports and music and girls. It was easy, and my new existence proceeded with neither falter nor glitch for all of five or six months.

And then, one fateful day that only seemed like any other day, I was sent to fetch some milk, left hand on the handlebars, right hand holding the transistorized Top 40 Countdown to my ear. Halfway to the grocery store lurked a favorite place, one of those little mom-and-pop enterprises nearly extinct these days, selling mostly tobacco products along with mysterious sundries, but also featuring a little lunch counter and modest soda fountain where girls smacked their gum while sipping cherry colas. With dinner still hours away I decided to stop for my usual Coke and order of fries garnished with a pond of ketchup. Hot and salty washed down with cold and sweet, an ageless combo that couldn't be beat.

Five or ten fries in, I swiveled my stool for a better look at an unfamiliar girl smacking gum down at the end of the counter. (Too much sharing or not, the scent of bubblegum remains a nostalgic turn-on to this day.) But when the girl caught me looking, and smacked her gum even louder, I just kept swiveling to pretend there was something else I wanted to check out,which is when my eyes fell upon it and the day turned fateful. It was the pusher from my junkie past, right there above the newspapers and next to the magazines—the comic-book rack I had so easily forsaken. But what truly caught my eye was something far more specific.

Like all comic-book racks of the time, this one displayed very little of its wares. Other than the bottom row, which was in any case obscured by stacked newspapers, you couldn't see anything

but logos sticking up—and what caught my eye was one particular logo jumping out from all the others like a hammered thumb. This was partially because I was familiar with all the other logos, titles of comics I'd either read or skipped for years, and this logo was entirely new, a title I'd never seen before. But even beyond that, there was something unusual at play here, something bizarre and even wrong. Paradoxical. It was like a tantalizing mistake in which the meaning of the title's words seemed to war with the shapes of the letters spelling the title out. The two words of the title conveyed something with a science fiction or fantasy or maybe even super hero bent, while the shapes of the letters suggested a humor book much like the larger *MAD* or *Cracked* magazines. It was a mystery too intriguing to ignore.

I hopped off my stool and pulled the comic from the rack. Its cover was weird enough, but things only got weirder when I spread the comic open next to my shoved-aside plate of fries and ketchup. The title, I quickly saw, told the truth; this was indeed a sci-fi/fantasy/super hero narrative. It was the logo's design that was incongruous and perhaps even misleading. This was no humor book. True, there was something quirky and even slightly cartoony about the artwork, but you could tell it was meant to be taken seriously. I don't recall exactly what I made of it at the time, but right now I'd characterize the style as "flamboyantly realistic." And the skimmed word balloons seemed to match. So the logo was definitely dissonant, although oddly appealing. And the interior pages, so different from all the similar comics on the rack, so weird, so strange, conveyed something utterly absorbing and insidiously compelling.

When I finally looked up, my fries were cold, the gum-smacking girl was gone, and my cold turkey was abruptly cooked for good. Indeed, I was not just hooked on comics all over again but addicted, I would soon learn, on a level far deeper than before.

I added the comic to my tab and dashed for my bike, frantic to grab that milk and race home so I could devour *Fantastic Four* #1 from cover to cover. It proved to be an even bigger wow than I suspected, and subsequent issues would only get better.

This was a formative time, you see, and I was hyper-susceptible. Stan Lee and Jack Kirby would exploit my eyes in the same way the Beatles would use my ears just a few years later—to conquer and claim my mind. Nothing else could compare or compete, other than the delirium-inducing scent of bubblegum. So what the devil had I been thinking? Peter Pan was absolutely right; growing up was highly overrated.

And the Fantastic Four were just the beginning of an onrushing obsession, an explosion of cool, soon to be known as Marvel Comics. Following in rapid succession were Spider-Man, Thor, the Hulk, Ant-Man, Iron Man, Doctor Strange, and all the rest of the horde. I loved them all, even Sgt. Fury and his Howling Commandos, and this one or that one that would briefly become my new fave. But time and again the original fab four would rise anew to reclaim that special number one slot. At some point I simply decided the unseemly cover brag was true: *Fantastic Four* really was the World's Greatest Comic Magazine.

Years passed during which I kinda-sorta grew up without ever really growing up, never dreaming I could actually make a living by writing, let alone writing comics, let alone writing my favorite comic. Yet somehow it all happened. I was in print (and paid for it!) within some eight years of *Fantastic Four* #1. Less than three years after that I was writing full-time for Marvel. But even then the thought of writing *Fantastic Four* never occurred to me. It may have been my favorite as a reader, but my writing tended to skew in different directions, invariably toward offbeat titles like *Werewolf by Night*, *Planet of the Apes*, *Master of Kung Fu* and *Moon Knight*. Most of this was natural inclination, I think, but there was also an element of deliberate avoidance. The "mainstream" titles all

carried a heavy freight of long and complex continuity, which in turn foreclosed any chance of total freedom. Titles like *Fantastic Four* and *Amazing Spider-Man* were simply too iconic and important to the company, demanding a substantial degree of control from above. Such control sets my teeth on edge. Look over my shoulder and you'll see nothing, because I simply can't operate that way.

Besides, I was entirely happy (and free!) where I was, in all my little offbeat domains. But then, editor Jim Salicrup actually asked me to write *Fantastic Four*. Whoa. This was flattering, of course, but also daunting. I voiced reluctance, telling him that while F4 was my favorite Marvel book, I didn't think I was right for it. Plus it would be a pain. Jim disagreed, saying he knew I could do it and he would throttle any pain. I tried to talk him out of it. And he, trying to talk me into it, pulled his ace. He wanted the art to be handled by none other than Bill Sienkiewicz, my pal and partner on *Moon Knight*.

So now it was truly tempting, but I still had misgivings galore. In my mind, *Fantastic Four* would always be Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, never Bill Sienkiewicz and me. Plus, how in the world could Bill handle another monthly deadline?

Then Bill himself called, all excited about doing F4. And don't worry about deadlines, he assured me, because he had suddenly immersed himself in some mysterious "flow" from which he was able to churn more and faster work than ever before.

Still dubious, I decided *all right already*, while committing to no more than a year. Jim Salicrup's response? "Who says I *want* you for more than a year?" Thanks, Jim, love you too.

Seeing Bill's pencils for our first issue, #219's "Leviathans," I immediately feared that I'd had good cause to fear all my fears. Even though I was no Stan Lee, I'd nevertheless pictured Jack Kirby visuals the whole time I was writing the story—and now Bill's style in the actual art was, of course, completely different. Which made me realize that my writing was also and inevitably completely different from the Stan Lee style. This concern, this apprehension of not living up to the legacy of my favorite comic, haunted me for the entire year of our run and I never did get over it. Looking back on the work now, however, I think I may have been a little too hard on myself and definitely way too hard on Bill. The art, at least, is extremely solid.

But then my deadline fears seemed instantly prophetic when #220 and #221 featured a two-part fill-in story by John Byrne. Yikes. Had Bill's magical flow already sprung a catastrophic leak? Had he blown a gasket after only *one measly issue?*

Nope, as it turns out, not at all. You see, Jim Salicrup was well aware of my deadline fears and was also aware that #219 had been running late before Bill and I even started work on it, and the last thing Jim wanted to hear was me telling him that I'd told him so. He needed a way to ease the time pressure on his new team, something that would at least give Bill and me a fighting chance. Which is apparently when felicity struck…

We can let John Byrne himself explain the rest: "Jim Salicrup had asked me if I wanted to do a comic book that would be distributed by Coca-Cola. They wanted to use the Fantastic Four in a self-contained story and they didn't want anything huge and cosmic, no planets exploding or anything like that. But when my very innocuous story was finished, Coca-Cola nevertheless thought it was much too violent. If you go back and look at it, you'll see that the Thing clobbers a couple of robots, but even that was too violent for Coke and they rejected it. Since the story was slightly shorter than a double-sized issue, Jim suggested we add a couple of pages, cut it in half, and run it as two issues of *Fantastic Four*."

Thereby freeing the new team to do our remaining 11 issues without further pause or interruption. Thank you, Jim Salicrup, John Byrne, and my once-favorite beverage for fries and ketchup—even though I gave up sugary soft drinks more than 40 years ago. And apologies for doubting my partner. Flow, Billy, flow.

True to his word, Jim Salicrup made the run as painless as possible, but my other fears—continuity and control—still came true to a certain degree. I remember being asked to feature certain characters I probably would not have touched of my own volition, and warned against going in certain directions because they might or might not conflict with other directions which might or might not be pursued elsewhere in the possible future. None of it was overbearing or even particularly bad. It was just all the mildly maddening stuff I much prefer to avoid, especially if total freedom is a viable alternative.

The worst of it, as I recall, involved Franklin Richards. Nobody could decide, at the time, how his vaguely evolving powers should be defined. Furthermore, the poor kid was tangled in some loose threads, which were now deemed less than binding. So I was asked to extricate him and then clarify things by establishing a new status quo, which didn't really clarify or define much of anything. Hey, at least I tried to make it interesting.

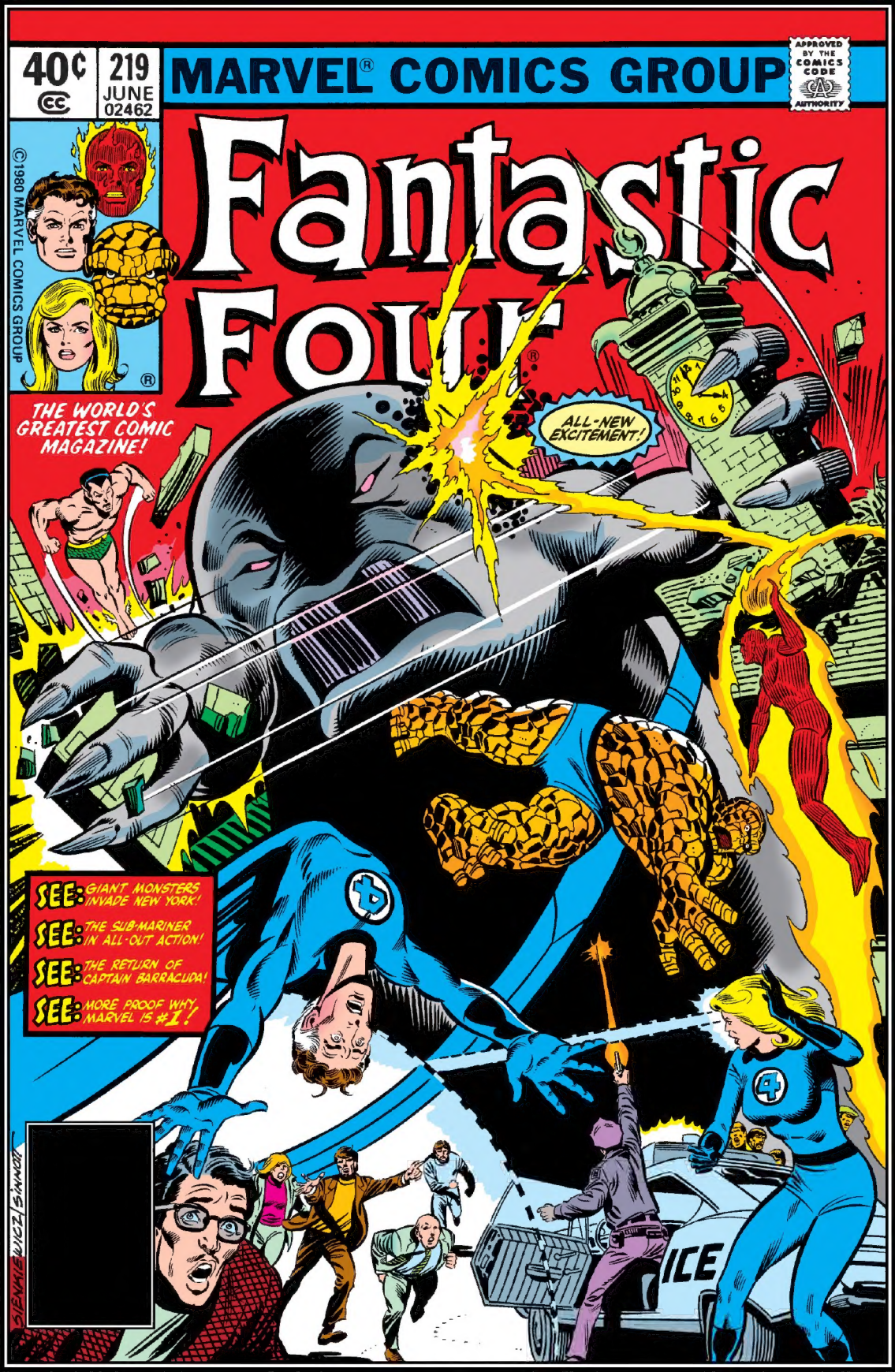
The year's commitment went beyond 12 issues to include a 13th, the double-sized *Annual* #15. And since no one, not even the mighty Bill Sienkiewicz, could flow hard enough to handle that extra workload, I was fortunate to be teamed with George Pérez. By this point George was fast becoming one of the best talents in comics, but I knew him from a few years back. Indeed, I wrote the very first Pérez piece published by Marvel, a humorous two-page Deathlok backup feature in *Astonishing Tales* #25. It was cute enough, but check out his work on this *Annual*. The man got good *quick*.

And although I have no memory of this, it seems my final issue was partially rewritten (continuity!) by someone credited as "Gurland." Except Gurland never really existed. He was Keyser Söze and Keyser Söze was actually Roger Stern and Gurland was his then-girlfriend's last name, meaning Stern's now nailed but I'm off the hook.

Finally, writing this introduction has revealed a rather large personal truth. If not for that paradoxically incongruous and wildly funky logo on the very first issue of *Fantastic Four*, I probably would have grown up riding a ridiculous cold turkey and never writing so much as a single comic book.

Maybe *that's* why they changed the logo.

2018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A brilliant scientist — the woman he loves — his best friend — and her fiery-tempered kid brother! Together, they braved the unknown terrors of outer space, and were changed by cosmic rays into something more than merely human! MR. FANTASTIC! THE INVISIBLE GIRL! THE THING! THE HUMAN TORCH! Now they are the FANTASTIC FOUR — and the world will never be the same again!

Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE FANTASTIC FOUR!®

LEVIATHANS

IT BEGINS WITH A TYPICAL NIGHT AT THE BAXTER BUILDING, HEADQUARTERS OF THE FABULOUS FANTASTIC FOUR-- BUT IT WILL END IN DEADLY ENCOUNTER WITH...

REMEMBER, JOHNNY, THE TIMING OF THIS EXPERIMENT IS CRUCIAL -- YOU MUST KEEP THOSE SOLUTIONS SUPER-HEATED UNTIL I'VE FINISHED MIXING THE CATALYST.

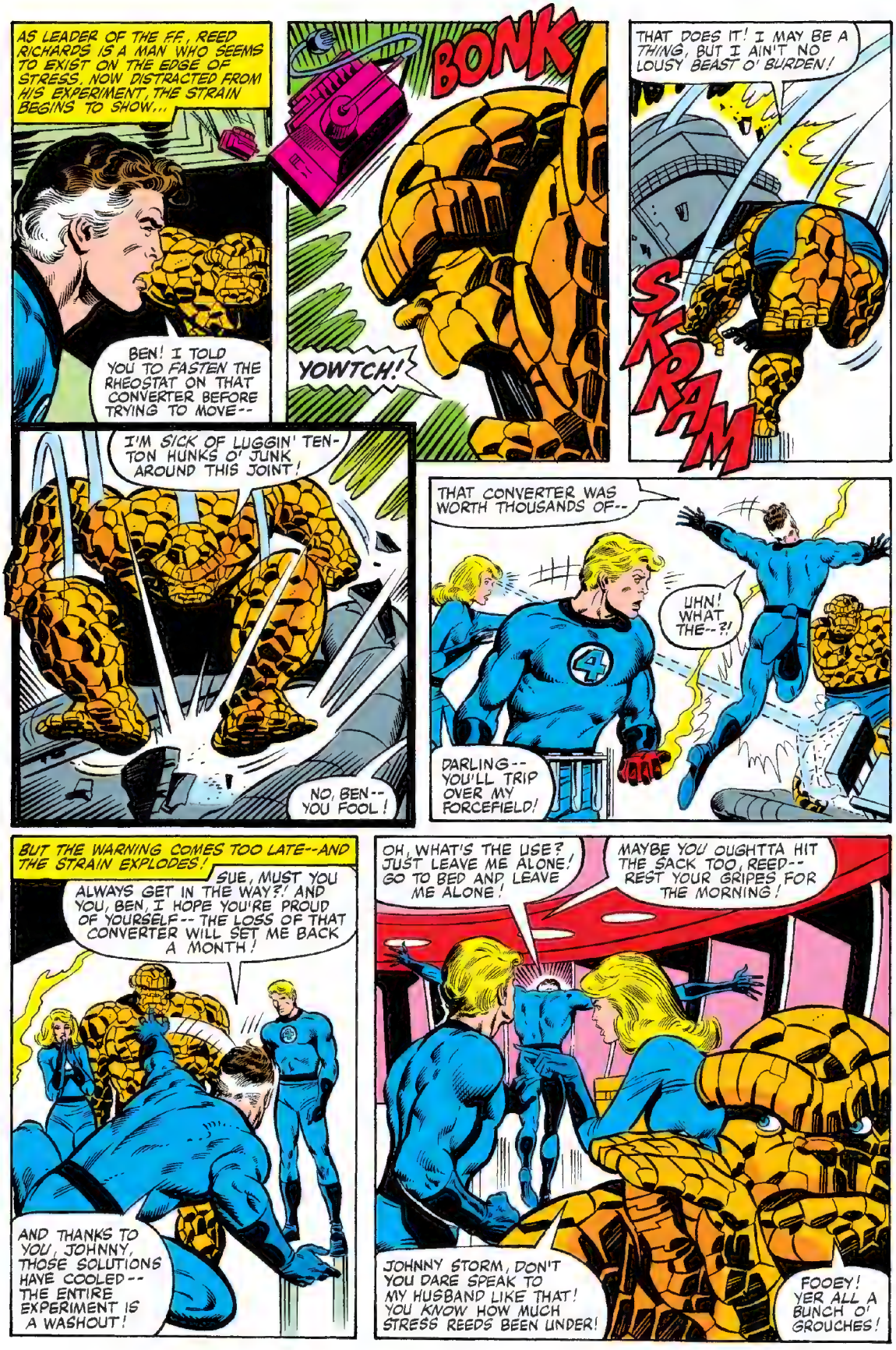
ALL RIGHT, REED, BUT I HOPE IT DOESN'T TAKE MUCH LONGER. I'M BUSHED.

MY INVISIBILITY POWERS MAY BE LIMITED, BUT THERE'S NO REASON I CAN'T APPLY MORE IMAGINATION TO THEM. STILL, EVEN WITH THESE FORCEFIELD "TONGS," I CAN BARELY LIFT THIS CHAIR OFF THE FLOOR.

WATCHIT, SUZIE, I'M COMIN' THROUGH.

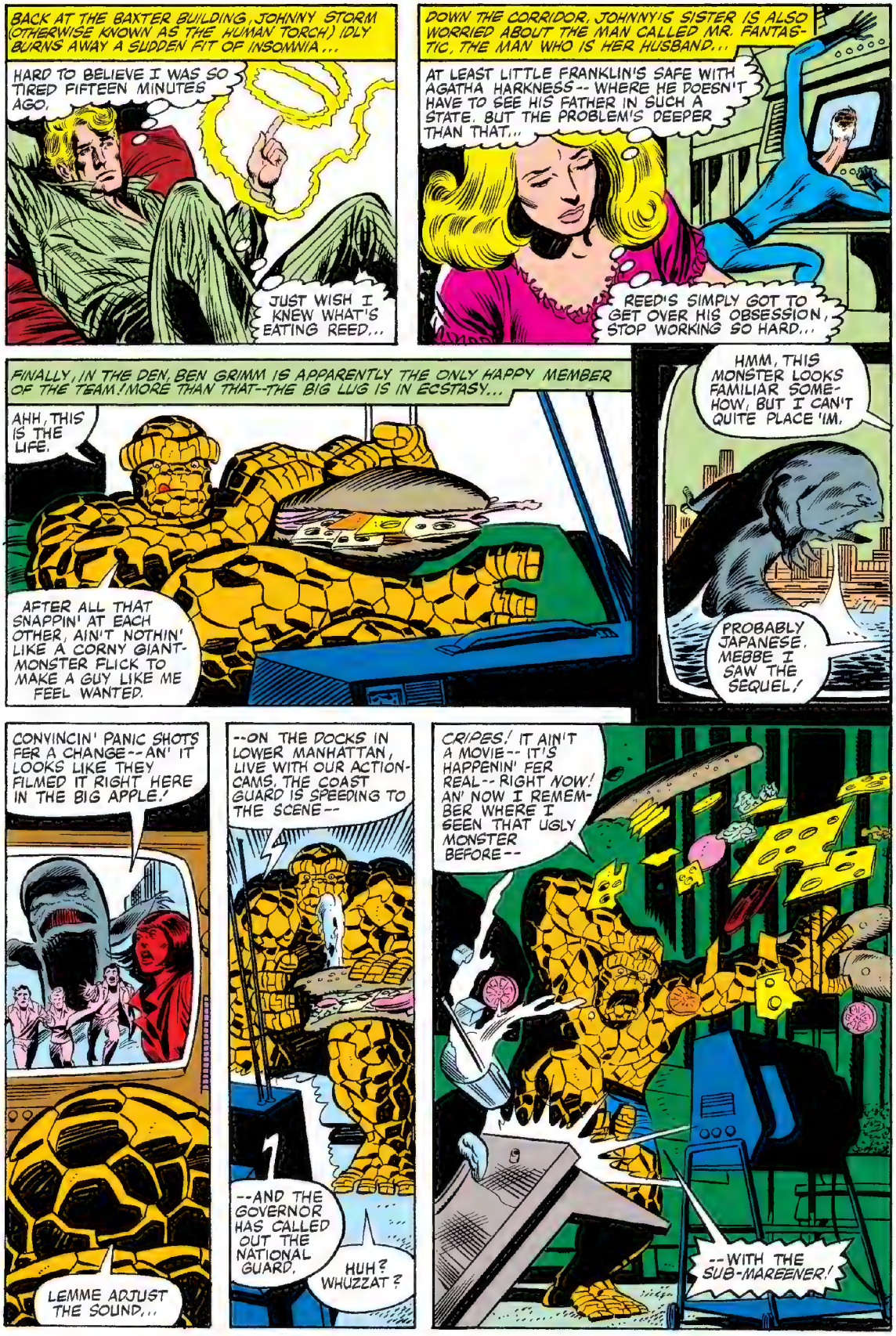
HEY, STRETCH -- HURRY UP AN' TELL ME WHERE YA WANT THIS JUNK OR I'LL MISS THE CREDITS ON THE LATE SHOW!

AND JUST SO YOU WON'T MISS OUR CREDITS, HOW ABOUT A MIGHTY MARVEL WELCOME FOR THIS ISSUE'S STALWART GUEST-TEAM:
DOUG MOENCH, WRITER
BILL SIENKIEWICZ & JOE SINNOTT ARTISTS
JIM NOVAK, LETTERER GEO. R., COLORIST
JIM SALICRUP, EDITOR
JIM SHOOTER, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF


AS LEADER OF THE FF, REED RICHARDS IS A MAN WHO SEEMS TO EXIST ON THE EDGE OF STRESS. NOW DISTRACTED FROM HIS EXPERIMENT, THE STRAIN BEGINS TO SHOW...
BEN! I TOLD YOU TO FASTEN THE RHEOSTAT ON THAT CONVERTER BEFORE TRYING TO MOVE--
BONK
YOWTCH!
THAT DOES IT! I MAY BE A THING, BUT I AIN'T NO LOUSY BEAST O' BURDEN!
SKRAM
I'M SICK OF LUGGIN' TEN-TON HUNKS O' JUNK AROUND THIS JOINT!
NO, BEN-- YOU FOOL!
THAT CONVERTER WAS WORTH THOUSANDS OF--
UHN! WHAT THE--?!
DARLING-- YOU'LL TRIP OVER MY FORCEFIELD!
BUT THE WARNING COMES TOO LATE--AND THE STRAIN EXPLODES!
SUE, MUST YOU ALWAYS GET IN THE WAY?! AND YOU, BEN, I HOPE YOU'RE PROUD OF YOURSELF-- THE LOSS OF THAT CONVERTER WILL SET ME BACK A MONTH!
AND THANKS TO YOU, JOHNNY, THOSE SOLUTIONS HAVE COOLED-- THE ENTIRE EXPERIMENT IS A WASHOUT!
OH, WHAT'S THE USE? JUST LEAVE ME ALONE! GO TO BED AND LEAVE ME ALONE!
MAYBE YOU OUGHTTA HIT THE SACK TOO, REED-- REST YOUR GRIPES FOR THE MORNING!
JOHNNY STORM, DON'T YOU DARE SPEAK TO MY HUSBAND LIKE THAT! YOU KNOW HOW MUCH STRESS REEDS BEEN UNDER!
FOOEY! YER ALL A BUNCH O' GROUCHES!

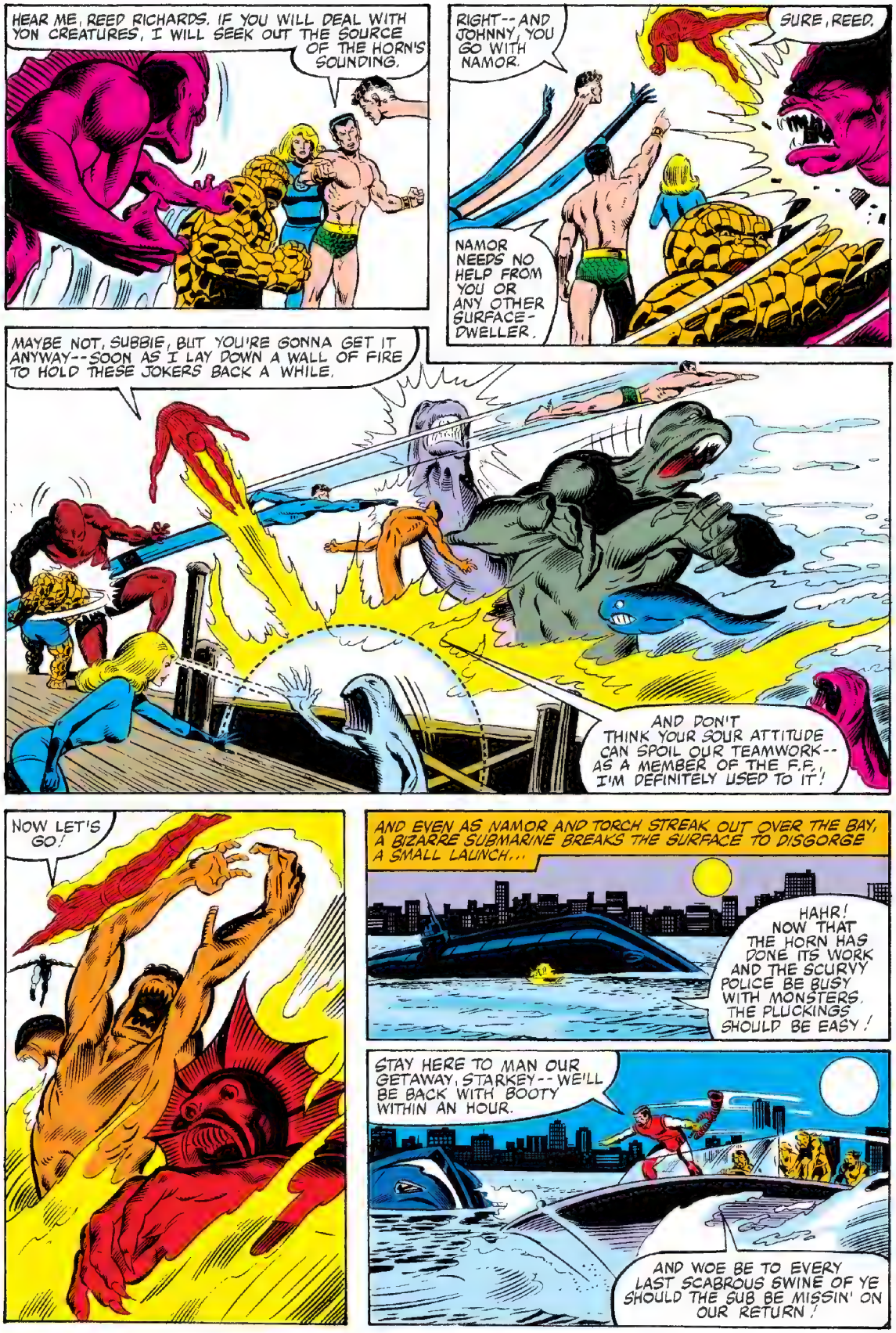
AND, WHILE THE MILD DOMESTIC TROUBLE AT THE BAXTER BUILDING COOLS TO A SIMMER, TROUBLE OF A FAR MORE URGENT NATURE THREATENS TO DESCEND ELSEWHERE...
...ON THE SUBSEA REALM OF FABLED ATLANTIS!
THE GUARDS ON THE RAMPARTS SPOT THEM STREAKING FROM THE MURK...
TORPEDOES!
...BUT THE ALARM COMES FAR TOO LATE.
KUH-BOOM
AND IN THE BEDCHAMBER OF THE PALACE ROYAL--
--A NOBLE PRINCE BORN IS RUDELY AWAKENED.
EH--?
BY NEPTUNE'S TRIDENT! ATLANTIS IS UNDER ATTACK!
BUT WHY?! AND WHO COULD--
AGH-H!!
THE OPERATION IS SWIFT AND EFFICIENT: WITH THE OUTER GUARDS DISPATCHED, THE STRANGELY ATTIRED DIVERS KNIFE INTO THE BREACHED PALACE...
HERE 'TIS--THE HORN!
AND THEN THEY ARE GONE...
...WHILE MOST OF ATLANTIS STILL SLUMBERS.

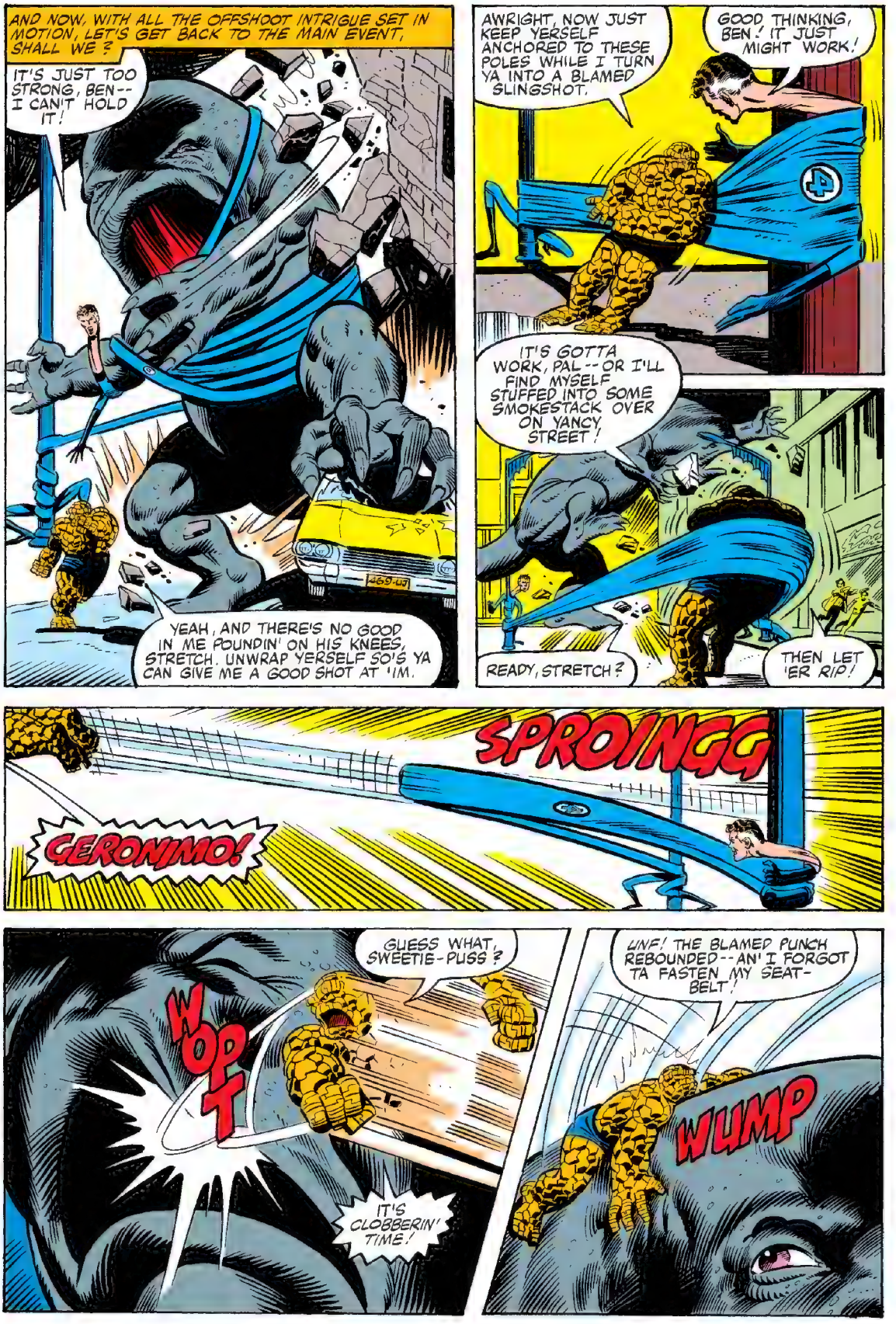
SHORTLY, HIDDEN BEYOND AN UNDERWATER RIDGE...
STARKEY TO SUB: MISSION ACCOMPLISHED! TELL CAP'N BARRACUDA WE GOT THE HORN!
THIS IS BARRACUDA, STARKEY! GOOD WORK, LADS!
INTO THE AIRLOCKS WITH YE--AND LET'S HAVE A LOOK-SEE AT THE THING!
AT LAST! WITH THE SUB-MARINER'S FABLED HORN, WE BE IN POSITION TO RULE ALL THE SEAS!
AYE, I LIKE THE SOUND OF IT--CAP'N BARRACUDA, KING OF THE DEEPS!
'TIS A FINE NIGHT WE BREATHE, YE SWABS! I'VE NOT ONLY TAKEN REVENGE ON THAT FISH-MAN FOR THE TIME I WAS ALMOST KILLED BY THE OMNI-DIRECTIONAL BEAM--*
--BUT NOW WE MAY USE THIS HORN TO CALL UP HIS SEA-CREATURES AND PLUNDER NEW YORK CITY ITSELF! THEN, WITH ENOUGH COIN TO BUILD AN ARMY, BARRACUDA WILL CHALLENGE ANYONE, ON THE HIGH SEAS!
*WAY BACK IN SUB-MARINER #1. -- JIM.
BUT EVEN AS BARRACUDA CROWS HIS TRIUMPH, THE PALACE ROYAL IS KNIFED WITH CRIES OF LAMENT...
NO! MY LIEGE IS FALLEN--SLAIN!
IT CANNOT BE TRUE!
NOR IS IT TRUE, MY LOYAL ATTENDANT! IT TAKES FAR MORE TO SLAY THE PRINCE BORN...
...BUT FAR LESS TO INCUR HIS WRATH! THERE WILL BE VENGEANCE THIS DARK NIGHT--ON THE BASE VILLAINS RESPONSIBLE FOR THIS ATTACK...AND FOR THE THEFT OF THE HORN!
SO VOWS PRINCE NAMOR.
SO VOWS THE SUB-MARINER!

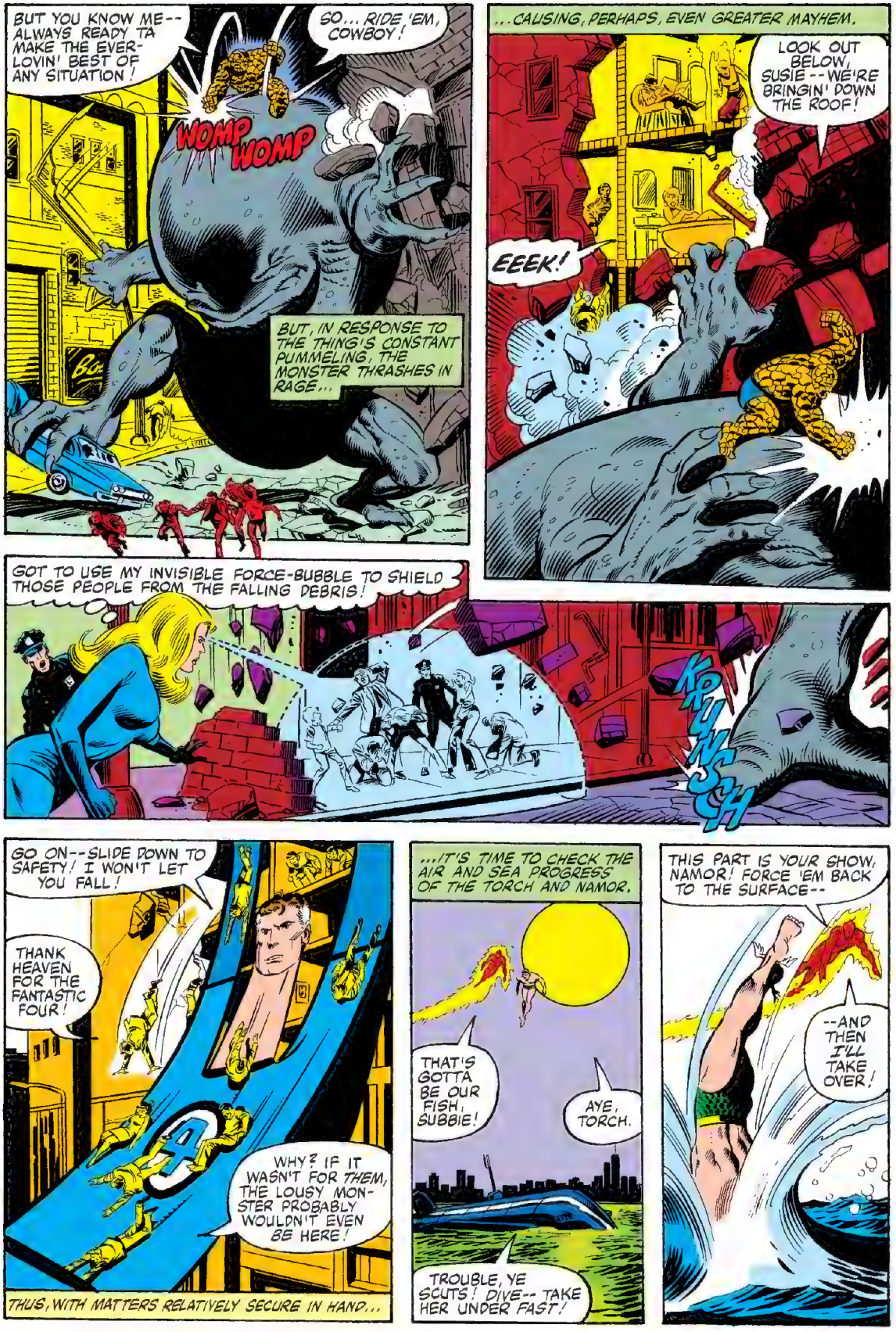

BACK AT THE BAXTER BUILDING, JOHNNY STORM (OTHERWISE KNOWN AS THE HUMAN TORCH) IDLY BURNS AWAY A SUDDEN FIT OF INSOMNIA...
HARD TO BELIEVE I WAS SO TIRED FIFTEEN MINUTES AGO.
JUST WISH I KNEW WHAT'S EATING REED...
DOWN THE CORRIDOR, JOHNNY'S SISTER IS ALSO WORRIED ABOUT THE MAN CALLED MR. FANTASTIC, THE MAN WHO IS HER HUSBAND...
AT LEAST LITTLE FRANKLIN'S SAFE WITH AGATHA HARKNESS -- WHERE HE DOESN'T HAVE TO SEE HIS FATHER IN SUCH A STATE. BUT THE PROBLEM'S DEEPER THAN THAT...
REED'S SIMPLY GOT TO GET OVER HIS OBSESSION, STOP WORKING SO HARD...
FINALLY, IN THE DEN, BEN GRIMM IS APPARENTLY THE ONLY HAPPY MEMBER OF THE TEAM! MORE THAN THAT--THE BIG LUG IS IN ECSTASY...
AHH, THIS IS THE LIFE.
AFTER ALL THAT SNAPPIN' AT EACH OTHER, AIN'T NOTHIN' LIKE A CORNY GIANT-MONSTER FLICK TO MAKE A GUY LIKE ME FEEL WANTED.
HMM, THIS MONSTER LOOKS FAMILIAR SOMEHOW, BUT I CAN'T QUITE PLACE 'IM.
PROBABLY JAPANESE. MEBBE I SAW THE SEQUEL!
CONVINCIN' PANIC SHOTS FER A CHANGE -- AN' IT LOOKS LIKE THEY FILMED IT RIGHT HERE IN THE BIG APPLE!
LEMME ADJUST THE SOUND...
--ON THE DOCKS IN LOWER MANHATTAN, LIVE WITH OUR ACTION-CAMS, THE COAST GUARD IS SPEEDING TO THE SCENE --
--AND THE GOVERNOR HAS CALLED OUT THE NATIONAL GUARD.
HUH? WHUZZAT?
CRIPES! IT AIN'T A MOVIE -- IT'S HAPPENIN' FER REAL -- RIGHT NOW! AN' NOW I REMEMBER WHERE I SEEN THAT UGLY MONSTER BEFORE --
--WITH THE SUB-MAREENER!

HEY! EVERYBODY UP AN' AT 'EM! WE GOT US A GIANT MONSTER TO CLOBBER!
WHAT IS IT, BEN? IF YOU'RE HAVING ANOTHER NIGHT-MARE--
IT AIN'T NO NIGHTMARE, TORCHIE-- IT'S FER REAL-- SUB-MAREENER'S GIANT MONSTER ATTACKIN' THE DOCKS--ON THE NEWS!
THEN I WANT EVERYONE DRESSED AND UP AT THE FANTASTICAR IN TWO MINUTES FLAT!
LET'S MOVE!
TWO MINUTES LATER...
JOHNNY--YOU GO AHEAD AND CHECK OUT THE SITUATION.
RIGHT, REED.
FLAME ON!
AND SO, BLAZING AN AERIAL TRAIL TO THE SCENE OF ACTION, THE HUMAN TORCH FINDS...
WHAT A MESS! AND THE COPS'LL NEVER STOP THAT MONSTER WITH JUST BULLETS...
...BUT MAYBE SOME FIRE-BALLS WOULD SLOW IT DOWN FOR A WHILE...
...AT LEAST TILL THE OTHERS GET HERE.
IT IS ONE OF NAMOR'S CREATURES, BEN.
YEAH--ONLY SMALLER. MEBBE IT'S THE SON OF PUG-UGLY.
I...I STILL CAN'T BELIEVE IT, NAMOR'S OUR FRIEND NOW...

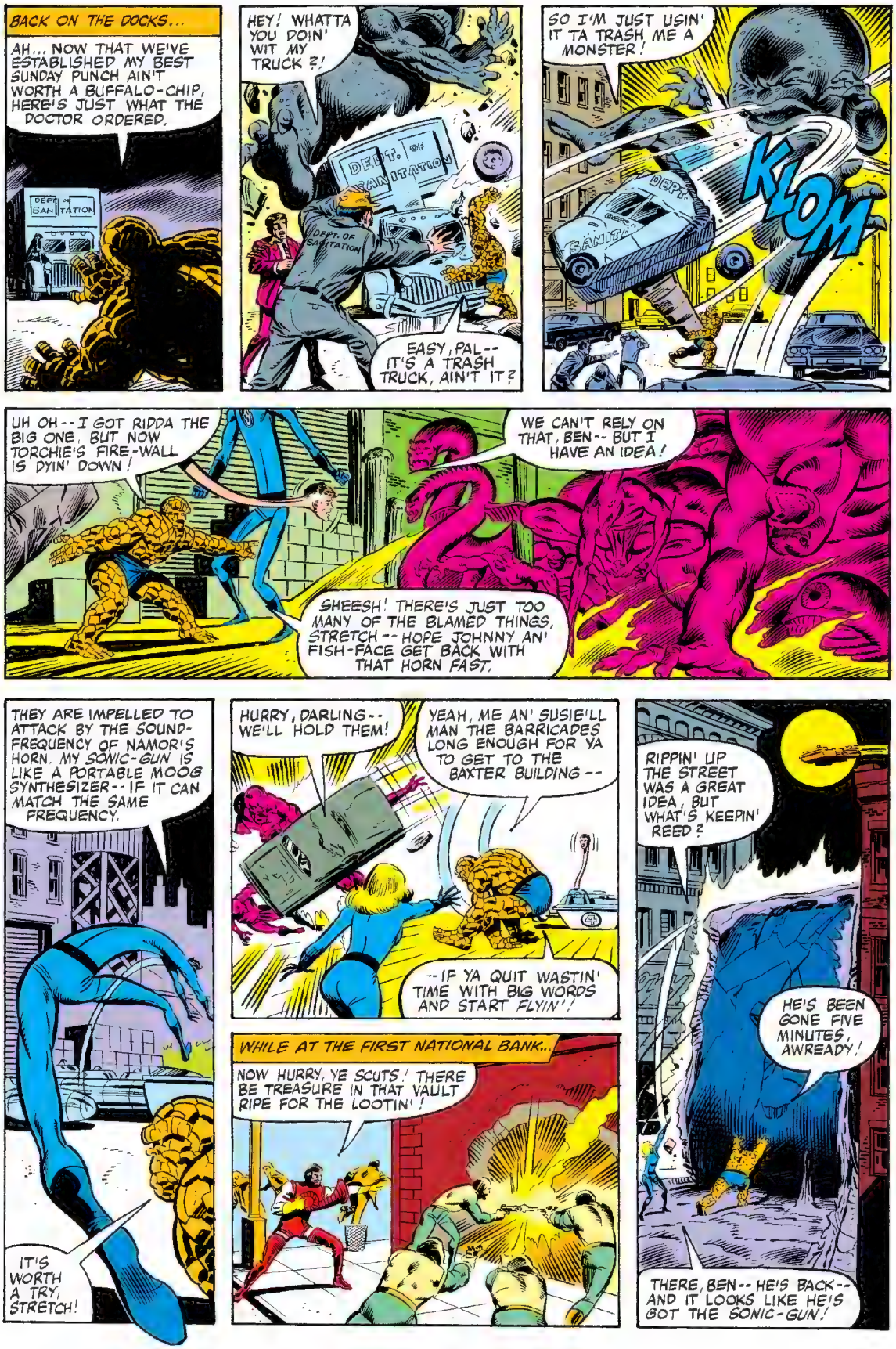
OH YEAH, SUSIE? THEN WHADDAYA SAY ABOUT THAT? C'MON, LET'S CLOBBER 'IM--I NEVER LIKED THE FISHY FREAK ANY-WAYS!
BUT REGAL NAMOR IS IN NO MOOD...
HALT, BENJAMIN GRIMM!
NAMOR HAS NO QUARREL WITH YOU AT THIS TIME!
THE PEACE IS UNEASY, BUT 'TIS STILL A PEACE.
YEAH? THEN EXPLAIN WHY YER BIG PAL IS TRASHIN' ALL THE DOCKSIDE PROPERTY.
THOUGH MY HORN IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE LEVIATHAN'S RISING, 'TIS NOT MY DOING. I SEEK ONLY TO REGAIN THE HORN FROM WHOEVER STOLE IT.
THEN YOU DON'T KNOW WHO IS RESPONSIBLE?
NAY, REED RICHARDS. I KNOW ONLY THAT FAIR ATLANTIS WAS TREACHEROUSLY ATTACKED--AND THAT THE VILLAINS MUST BE PUNISHED!
SO YOU HAVE FOLLOWED THE MONSTER HOPING TO FIND THE HORN. LOGICAL...
WHILE YOU TWO ARE BUSY FLAPPIN' YER JAWS, THE REST OF US BETTER STOP THAT MONSTER BEFORE--
BAWAAWW
LISTEN! 'TIS MY HORN--SOUNDING YET AGAIN!
AND, AS IF IN IMMEDIATE RESPONSE TO THE EERIE BLARE, THE DOCKS ARE SUDDENLY CRAWLING WITH BATRACHIAN MENACE...
YEESH! THERE'S MORE O' THE BLAMED THINGS...
--ALL KINDS O' SLIMY MONSTERS!

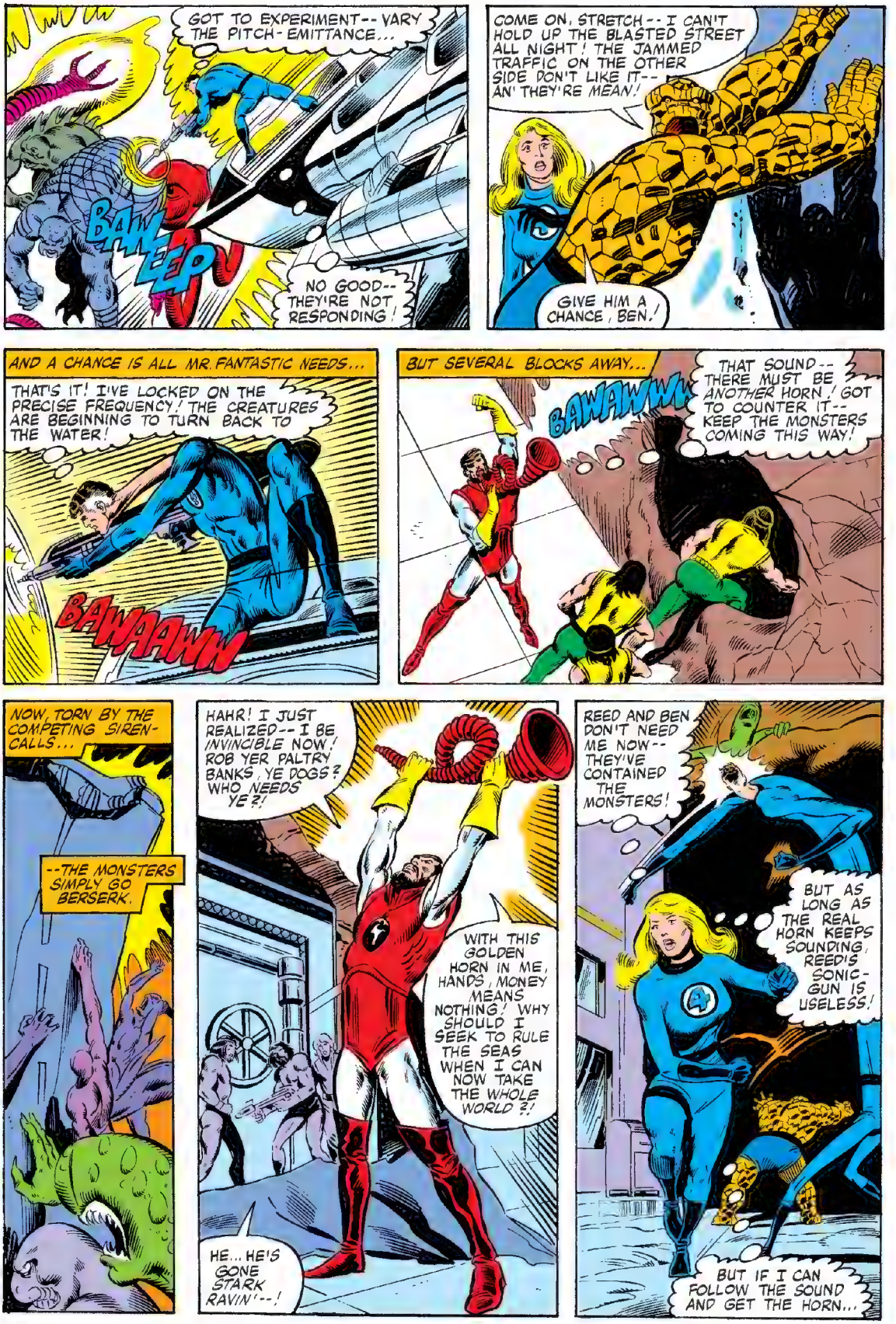

HEAR ME, REED RICHARDS. IF YOU WILL DEAL WITH YON CREATURES, I WILL SEEK OUT THE SOURCE OF THE HORN'S SOUNDING.
RIGHT--AND JOHNNY, YOU GO WITH NAMOR.
SURE, REED.
NAMOR NEEDS NO HELP FROM YOU OR ANY OTHER SURFACE-DWELLER.
MAYBE NOT, SUBBIE, BUT YOU'RE GONNA GET IT ANYWAY--SOON AS I LAY DOWN A WALL OF FIRE TO HOLD THESE JOKERS BACK A WHILE.
AND DON'T THINK YOUR SOUR ATTITUDE CAN SPOIL OUR TEAMWORK--AS A MEMBER OF THE F.F., I'M DEFINITELY USED TO IT!
NOW LET'S GO!
AND EVEN AS NAMOR AND TORCH STREAK OUT OVER THE BAY, A BIZARRE SUBMARINE BREAKS THE SURFACE TO DISGORGE A SMALL LAUNCH...
HAHR! NOW THAT THE HORN HAS DONE ITS WORK AND THE SCURVY POLICE BE BUSY WITH MONSTERS, THE PLUCKINGS SHOULD BE EASY!
STAY HERE TO MAN OUR GETAWAY, STARKEY--WE'LL BE BACK WITH BOOTY WITHIN AN HOUR.
AND WOE BE TO EVERY LAST SCABROUS SWINE OF YE SHOULD THE SUB BE MISSIN' ON OUR RETURN!


AND NOW, WITH ALL THE OFFSHOOT INTRIGUE SET IN MOTION, LET'S GET BACK TO THE MAIN EVENT, SHALL WE?
IT'S JUST TOO STRONG, BEN-- I CAN'T HOLD IT!
YEAH, AND THERE'S NO GOOD IN ME POUNDIN' ON HIS KNEES, STRETCH. UNWRAP YERSELF SO'S YA CAN GIVE ME A GOOD SHOT AT 'IM.
AWRIGHT, NOW JUST KEEP YERSELF ANCHORED TO THESE POLES WHILE I TURN YA INTO A BLAMED SLINGSHOT.
GOOD THINKING, BEN! IT JUST MIGHT WORK!
IT'S GOTTA WORK, PAL--OR I'LL FIND MYSELF STUFFED INTO SOME SMOKESTACK OVER ON YANCY STREET!
READY, STRETCH?
THEN LET 'ER RIP!
SPROINGG
GERONIMO!
GUESS WHAT, SWEETIE-PUSS?
WOPT
IT'S CLOBBERIN' TIME!
UNF! THE BLAMED PUNCH REBOUNDED--AN' I FORGOT TA FASTEN MY SEAT-BELT!
WUMP

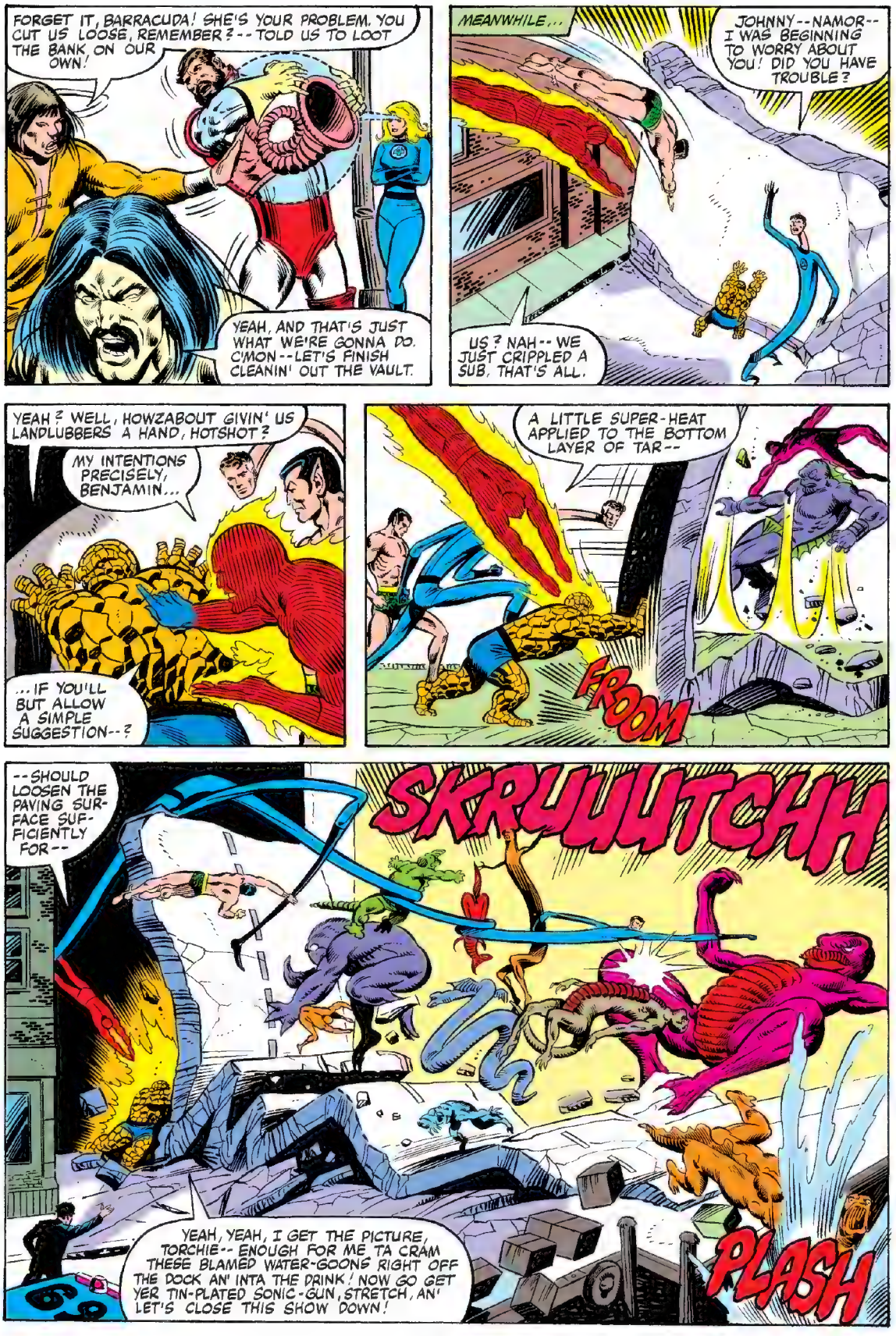

BUT YOU KNOW ME--ALWAYS READY TA MAKE THE EVER-LOVIN' BEST OF ANY SITUATION!
SO... RIDE 'EM, COWBOY!
WOMP WOMP
BUT, IN RESPONSE TO THE THING'S CONSTANT PUMMELING, THE MONSTER THRASHES IN RAGE...
...CAUSING, PERHAPS, EVEN GREATER MAYHEM.
LOOK OUT BELOW, SUSIE--WE'RE BRINGIN' DOWN THE ROOF!
EEEK!
GOT TO USE MY INVISIBLE FORCE-BUBBLE TO SHIELD THOSE PEOPLE FROM THE FALLING DEBRIS!
KRUNCH
GO ON--SLIDE DOWN TO SAFETY! I WON'T LET YOU FALL!
THANK HEAVEN FOR THE FANTASTIC FOUR!
WHY? IF IT WASN'T FOR THEM, THE LOUSY MONSTER PROBABLY WOULDN'T EVEN BE HERE!
THUS, WITH MATTERS RELATIVELY SECURE IN HAND...
...IT'S TIME TO CHECK THE AIR AND SEA PROGRESS OF THE TORCH AND NAMOR.
THAT'S GOTTA BE OUR FISH, SUBBIE!
AYE, TORCH.
TROUBLE, YE SCUTS! DIVE-- TAKE HER UNDER FAST!
THIS PART IS YOUR SHOW, NAMOR! FORCE 'EM BACK TO THE SURFACE--
--AND THEN I'LL TAKE OVER!

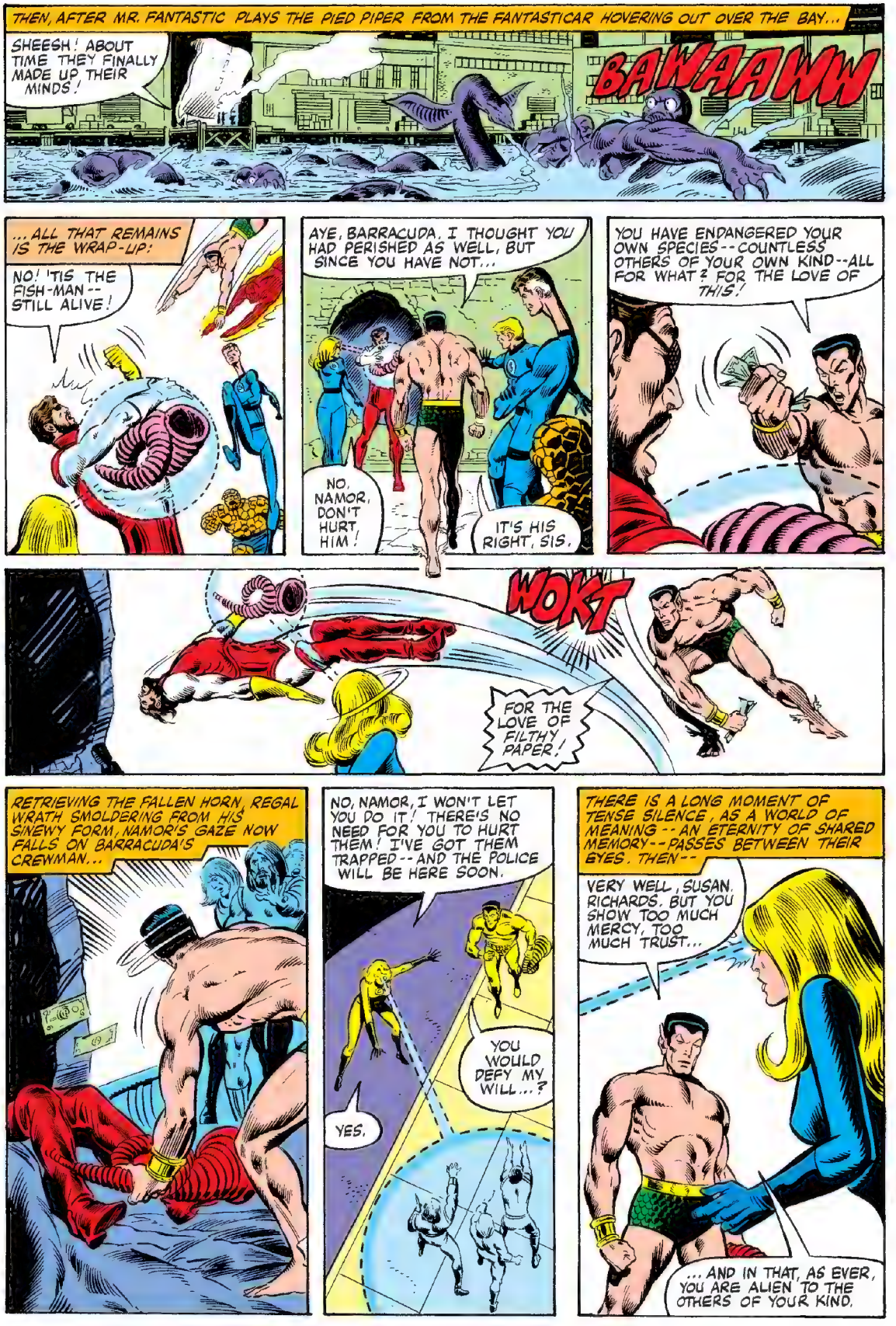
FLASHING UNDER THE FLEEING SUB, NAMOR BEGINS A SWIFT, STRONG CIRCULAR MANEUVER...
...FORCING THE VESSEL TO BOB TO THE SURFACE...
LOOKS LIKE MY CUE!
VOILA! ONE NEAT ENTRY PORTAL MELTED THROUGH THE HULL!
I TOLD YOU FIRE AND WATER WOULD MAKE A GOOD COMBO, SUBBIE!
ALL RIGHT, PLAYMATES, IT'S TALKING TIME, UNLESS YOU WANT US TO--
NO! WE DIDN'T DO A THING! BARRACUDA'S ALREADY GONE ASHORE!
IT'S TRUE-- HE WENT TO LOOT THE FIRST NATIONAL BANK! HE TOOK YOUR HORN WITH HIM!
BARRACUDA, HUH? I WONDERED WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM AFTER HE TANGLED WITH ME AND ICEMAN. *
*WAY BACK IN STRANGE TALES #120. --JIM.
I, TOO, HAVE HAD DEALINGS WITH THIS BARRACUDA, TORCH -- BUT I ASSUMED HE WAS DEAD.
OBVIOUSLY NOT, SUBBIE...
KWHOOM
...AND NOW THAT I'VE RENDERED THE SUB HELPLESS BY FUSING ITS CONTROLS INTO SLAG-- LET'S GO GET HIM!
AYE, TORCH... LET US GO AND GET HIM!

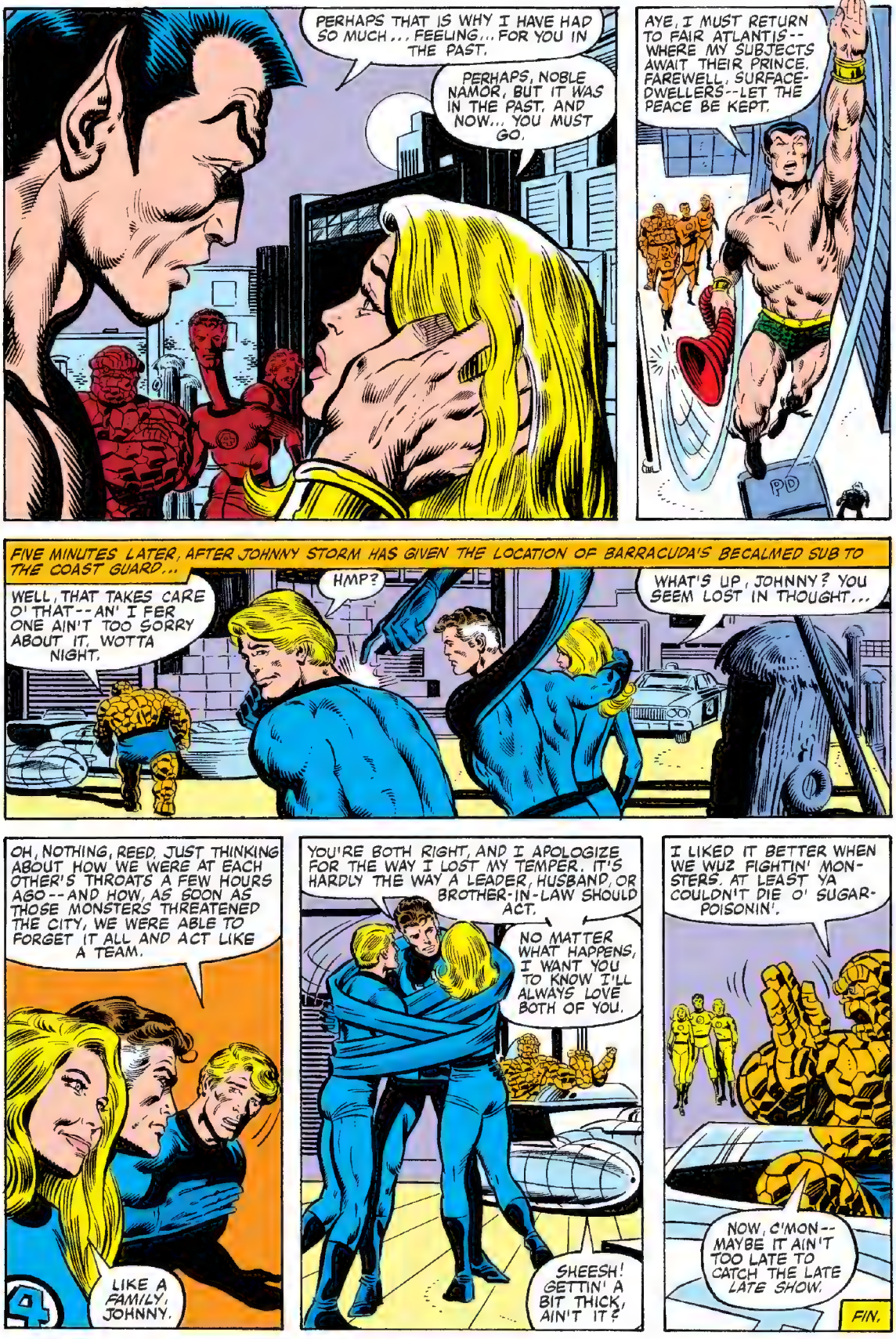

BACK ON THE DOCKS...
AH... NOW THAT WE'VE ESTABLISHED MY BEST SUNDAY PUNCH AIN'T WORTH A BUFFALO-CHIP, HERE'S JUST WHAT THE DOCTOR ORDERED.
DEPT. OF SANITATION
HEY! WHATTA YOU DOIN' WIT MY TRUCK?!
DEPT. OF SANITATION
EASY, PAL-- IT'S A TRASH TRUCK, AIN'T IT?
SO I'M JUST USIN' IT TA TRASH ME A MONSTER!
KLOM
UH OH--I GOT RIDDA THE BIG ONE, BUT NOW TORCHIE'S FIRE-WALL IS DYIN' DOWN!
WE CAN'T RELY ON THAT, BEN-- BUT I HAVE AN IDEA!
SHEESH! THERE'S JUST TOO MANY OF THE BLAMED THINGS, STRETCH-- HOPE JOHNNY AN' FISH-FACE GET BACK WITH THAT HORN FAST.
THEY ARE IMPELLED TO ATTACK BY THE SOUND-FREQUENCY OF NAMOR'S HORN. MY SONIC-GUN IS LIKE A PORTABLE MOOG SYNTHESIZER--IF IT CAN MATCH THE SAME FREQUENCY.
IT'S WORTH A TRY, STRETCH!
HURRY, DARLING-- WE'LL HOLD THEM!
YEAH, ME AN' SUSIE'LL MAN THE BARRICADES LONG ENOUGH FOR YA TO GET TO THE BAXTER BUILDING--
--IF YA QUIT WASTIN' TIME WITH BIG WORDS AND START FLYIN'!
WHILE AT THE FIRST NATIONAL BANK...
NOW HURRY, YE SCUTS! THERE BE TREASURE IN THAT VAULT RIPE FOR THE LOOTIN'!
RIPPIN' UP THE STREET WAS A GREAT IDEA, BUT WHAT'S KEEPIN' REED?
HE'S BEEN GONE FIVE MINUTES, AWREADY!
THERE, BEN-- HE'S BACK-- AND IT LOOKS LIKE HE'S GOT THE SONIC-GUN!


GOT TO EXPERIMENT-- VARY THE PITCH-EMITTANCE...
BAW EEP
NO GOOD-- THEY'RE NOT RESPONDING!
COME ON, STRETCH-- I CAN'T HOLD UP THE BLASTED STREET ALL NIGHT! THE JAMMED TRAFFIC ON THE OTHER SIDE DON'T LIKE IT-- AN' THEY'RE MEAN!
GIVE HIM A CHANCE, BEN.!
AND A CHANCE IS ALL MR. FANTASTIC NEEDS...
THAT'S IT! I'VE LOCKED ON THE PRECISE FREQUENCY! THE CREATURES ARE BEGINNING TO TURN BACK TO THE WATER!
BAWAAWW
BUT SEVERAL BLOCKS AWAY...
BAWAWW
THAT SOUND-- THERE MUST BE ANOTHER HORN! GOT TO COUNTER IT-- KEEP THE MONSTERS COMING THIS WAY!
NOW, TORN BY THE COMPETING SIREN-CALLS...
--THE MONSTERS SIMPLY GO BERSERK.
HAHR! I JUST REALIZED-- I BE INVINCIBLE NOW! ROB YER PALTRY BANKS, YE DOGS? WHO NEEDS YE?!
WITH THIS GOLDEN HORN IN ME, HANDS, MONEY MEANS NOTHING! WHY SHOULD I SEEK TO RULE THE SEAS WHEN I CAN NOW TAKE THE WHOLE WORLD?!
HE... HE'S GONE STARK RAVIN'--!
REED AND BEN DON'T NEED ME NOW-- THEY'VE CONTAINED THE MONSTERS!
BUT AS LONG AS THE REAL HORN KEEPS SOUNDING, REED'S SONIC-GUN IS USELESS!
BUT IF I CAN FOLLOW THE SOUND AND GET THE HORN...

BARRACUDA'S CUTTIN' YE LOOSE, DOGS! I'LL SHARE MY CONQUEST WITH NO ONE!
BARRACUDA! JOHNNY MENTIONED HIM LONG AGO--AND NOW HE'S GOT THE HORN...
BUT HE'S MAD --ABSOLUTELY INSANE!
I'LL APPROACH HIM BY TURNING INVISIBLE--BUT I CAN'T GET TOO CLOSE AND RISK GIVING MYSELF AWAY BY SOUND... SO PERHAPS I SHOULD PUT MY EARLIER PRACTICE TO WORK.
MINE, YE BEAUTY--ALL MINE!
EH? WHAT THE--?!
BY BLUEBEARD'S GHOST--SOME UNSEEN FORCE PULLING AT IT? IS THE HORN BEWITCHED?!
NO USE--I DON'T HAVE ENOUGH STRENGTH OR CONTROL YET!
BUT IF I CAN'T GET THE HORN, AT LEAST I CAN KEEP HIM AWAY FROM IT--BY SEALING IT IN A FORCE-BUBBLE!
'TIS MADNESS! MY HANDS BE SOMEHOW FORCED AWAY FROM THE HORN!
BUT EVEN WITHOUT THE HORN, THE SEA-CREATURES ARE NOW POSSESSED BY A FRENZY OF CONFUSION...
AND ONLY BEN GRIMM'S MAKESHIFT BARRICADE PREVENTS THEIR RAGE FROM SPILLING INTO THE HEART OF THE CITY.
HELP ME, YE SCURVY BARNACLE-BAIT! 'TIS THE WENCH! SHE APPEARED BEFORE ME VERY EYES--FROM THIN AIR--BEWITCHED THE HORN! TAKE HER!
WUMP


FORGET IT, BARRACUDA! SHE'S YOUR PROBLEM. YOU CUT US LOOSE, REMEMBER?--TOLD US TO LOOT THE BANK ON OUR OWN!
YEAH, AND THAT'S JUST WHAT WE'RE GONNA DO. C'MON--LET'S FINISH CLEANIN' OUT THE VAULT.
MEANWHILE...
JOHNNY--NAMOR--I WAS BEGINNING TO WORRY ABOUT YOU! DID YOU HAVE TROUBLE?
US? NAH--WE JUST CRIPPLED A SUB, THAT'S ALL.
YEAH? WELL, HOWZABOUT GIVIN' US LANDLUBBERS A HAND, HOTSHOT?
MY INTENTIONS PRECISELY, BENJAMIN...
...IF YOU'LL BUT ALLOW A SIMPLE SUGGESTION--?
A LITTLE SUPER-HEAT APPLIED TO THE BOTTOM LAYER OF TAR--
FROOM
--SHOULD LOOSEN THE PAVING SURFACE SUFFICIENTLY FOR--
SKRUUUTCHH
YEAH, YEAH, I GET THE PICTURE, TORCHIE-- ENOUGH FOR ME TA CRAM THESE BLAMED WATER-GOONS RIGHT OFF THE DOCK AN' INTA THE DRINK! NOW GO GET YER TIN-PLATED SONIC-GUN, STRETCH, AN' LET'S CLOSE THIS SHOW DOWN!
PLASH


THEN, AFTER MR. FANTASTIC PLAYS THE PIED PIPER FROM THE FANTASTICAR HOVERING OUT OVER THE BAY...
SHEESH! ABOUT TIME THEY FINALLY MADE UP THEIR MINDS!
BAWAAWW
...ALL THAT REMAINS IS THE WRAP-UP:
NO! 'TIS THE FISH-MAN--STILL ALIVE!
AYE, BARRACUDA, I THOUGHT YOU HAD PERISHED AS WELL, BUT SINCE YOU HAVE NOT...
NO, NAMOR, DON'T HURT HIM!
IT'S HIS RIGHT, SIS.
YOU HAVE ENDANGERED YOUR OWN SPECIES--COUNTLESS OTHERS OF YOUR OWN KIND--ALL FOR WHAT? FOR THE LOVE OF THIS!
WOKT
FOR THE LOVE OF FILTHY PAPER!
RETRIEVING THE FALLEN HORN, REGAL WRATH SMOLDERING FROM HIS SINEWY FORM, NAMOR'S GAZE NOW FALLS ON BARRACUDA'S CREWMAN...
NO, NAMOR, I WON'T LET YOU DO IT! THERE'S NO NEED FOR YOU TO HURT THEM! I'VE GOT THEM TRAPPED--AND THE POLICE WILL BE HERE SOON.
YOU WOULD DEFY MY WILL...?
YES.
THERE IS A LONG MOMENT OF TENSE SILENCE, AS A WORLD OF MEANING--AN ETERNITY OF SHARED MEMORY--PASSES BETWEEN THEIR EYES. THEN--
VERY WELL, SUSAN RICHARDS. BUT YOU SHOW TOO MUCH MERCY, TOO MUCH TRUST...
...AND IN THAT, AS EVER, YOU ARE ALIEN TO THE OTHERS OF YOUR KIND.


PERHAPS THAT IS WHY I HAVE HAD SO MUCH... FEELING... FOR YOU IN THE PAST.
PERHAPS, NOBLE NAMOR, BUT IT WAS IN THE PAST. AND NOW... YOU MUST GO.
AYE, I MUST RETURN TO FAIR ATLANTIS--WHERE MY SUBJECTS AWAIT THEIR PRINCE. FAREWELL, SURFACE-DWELLERS--LET THE PEACE BE KEPT.
FIVE MINUTES LATER, AFTER JOHNNY STORM HAS GIVEN THE LOCATION OF BARRACUDA'S BECALMED SUB TO THE COAST GUARD...
WELL, THAT TAKES CARE O' THAT--AN' I FER ONE AIN'T TOO SORRY ABOUT IT, WOTTA NIGHT.
HMP?
WHAT'S UP, JOHNNY? YOU SEEM LOST IN THOUGHT...
OH, NOTHING, REED. JUST THINKING ABOUT HOW WE WERE AT EACH OTHER'S THROATS A FEW HOURS AGO--AND HOW, AS SOON AS THOSE MONSTERS THREATENED THE CITY, WE WERE ABLE TO FORGET IT ALL AND ACT LIKE A TEAM.
LIKE A FAMILY, JOHNNY.
YOU'RE BOTH RIGHT, AND I APOLOGIZE FOR THE WAY I LOST MY TEMPER. IT'S HARDLY THE WAY A LEADER, HUSBAND, OR BROTHER-IN-LAW SHOULD ACT.
NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS, I WANT YOU TO KNOW I'LL ALWAYS LOVE BOTH OF YOU.
SHEESH! GETTIN' A BIT THICK, AIN'T IT?
I LIKED IT BETTER WHEN WE WUZ FIGHTIN' MONSTERS. AT LEAST YA COULDN'T DIE O' SUGAR-POISONIN'.
NOW, C'MON--MAYBE IT AIN'T TOO LATE TO CATCH THE LATE LATE SHOW.
FIN.

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REACH FOR THE STARS!
JOHN BYRNE and JOE SINNOTT

Reed Richards! Ben Grimm! Sue Richards! Johnny Storm! Together they braved the unknown terrors of outer space and were changed into something more than human! MR. FANTASTIC! THE THING! THE INVISIBLE GIRL! THE HUMAN TORCH! And now the world will never again be the same!

Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE FANTASTIC FOUR!®

"...AND THE LIGHTS WENT OUT ALL OVER THE WORLD!"

NEW YORK. AS THE ICY WINDS OF LATE WINTER ROAR DOWN THE BROAD AVENUES OF THIS WORLD CITY, THE THOUGHTS OF SOME TURN TO SUNNIER CLIMES.
CASE IN POINT...ONE BENJAMIN J. GRIMM, BETTER KNOWN AS THE THING... AND THE LOVE OF HIS LIFE-- FAMED BLIND SCULPTRESS, ALICIA MASTERS!
TAXI
THIS IS IT, BABE-- WE'RE ON OUR WAY! JUST ANOTHER THREE HOURS, AND WE'LL BE BASKIN' ON THE BEACH AT ST. THOMAS!
I GOTTA LOOK MORE CLOSELY BEFORE I PICK UP FARES!
I MEAN, IT'S A THRILL TO GIVE THE THING AN' HIS GIRLFRIEND A RIDE...
... BUT THE FANTASTIC FOUR GOT THEMSELVES A LOTTA ENEMIES! WHAT IF ONE ATTACKED RIGHT NOW?
I JUST KNOW I AIN'T COVERED FOR THAT KINDA DAMAGE!

JOHN BYRNE
WORDS & PICTURES
JOE SINNOTT
RENDERING & EMBELLISHMENT
NOVAK & WATANABE
LETTERING
BOB SHAREN COLORING
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JIM SHOOTER
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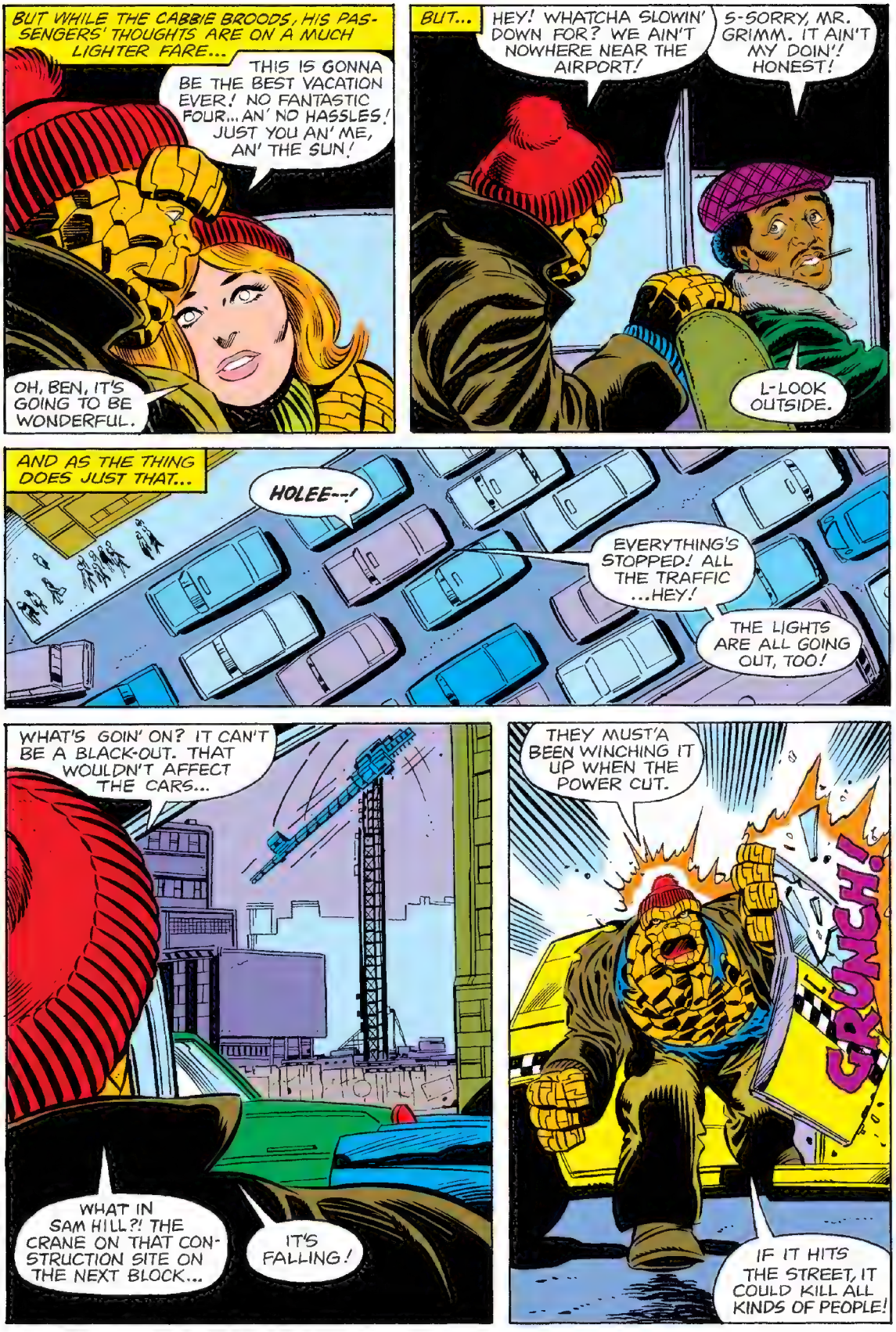
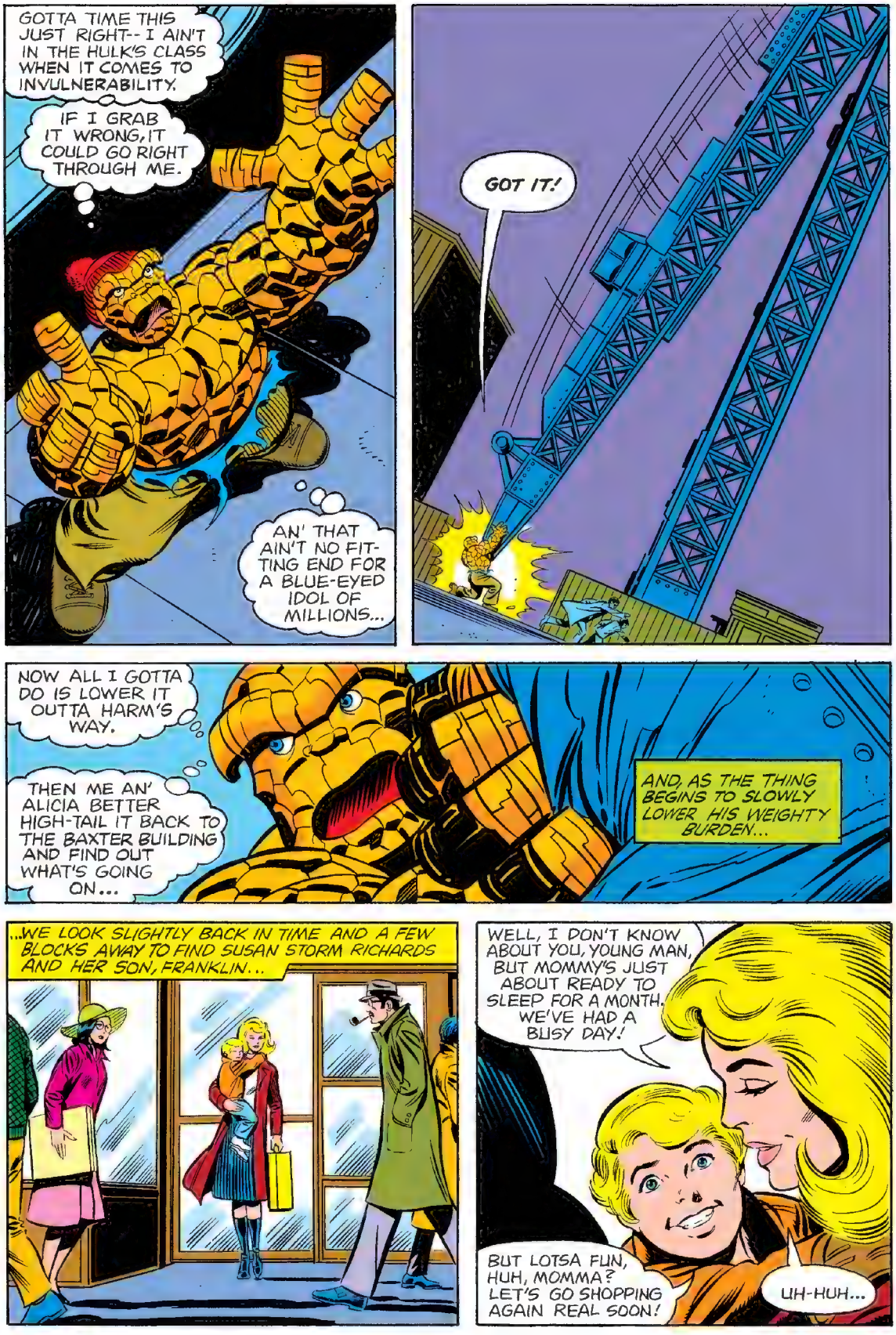
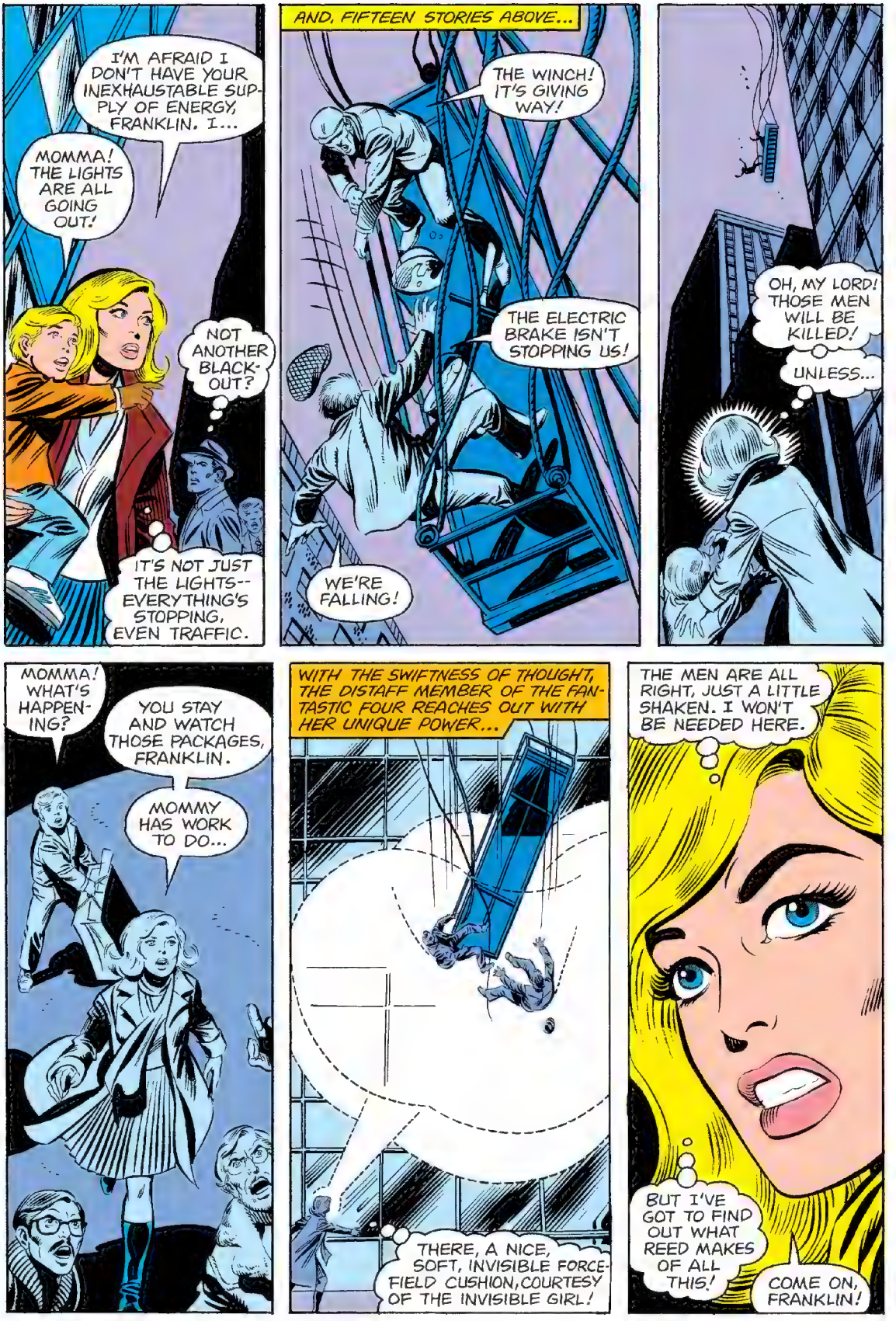
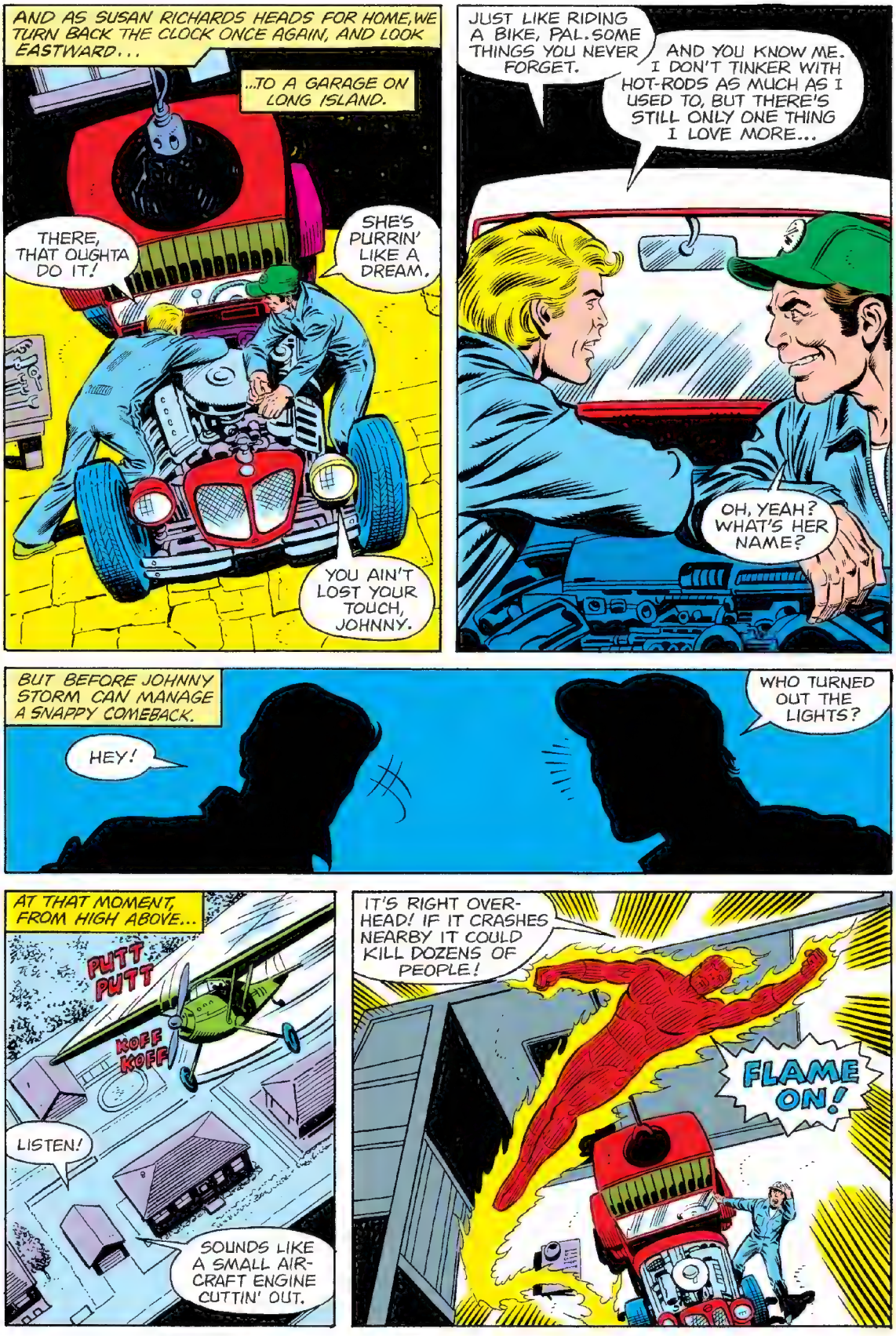
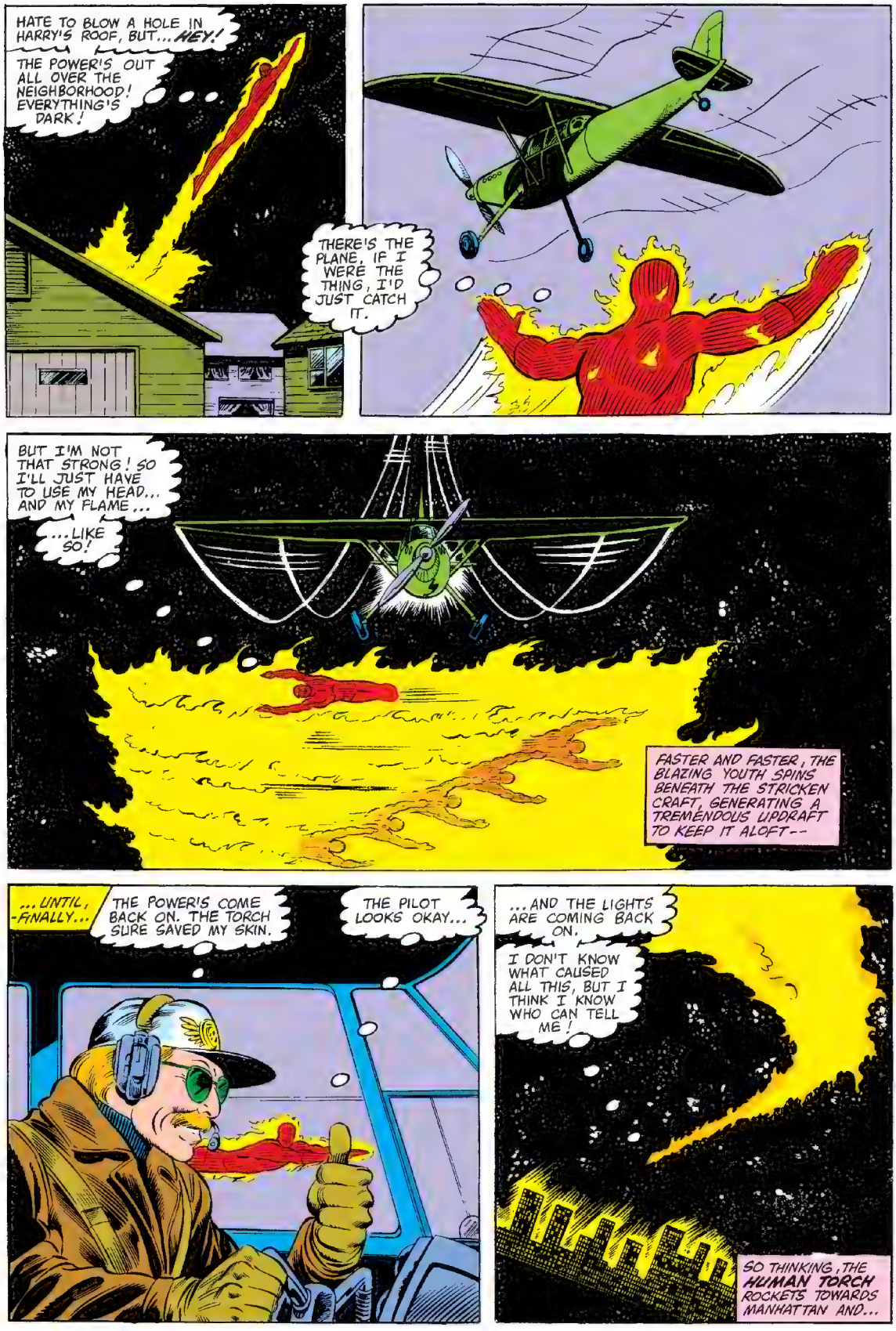
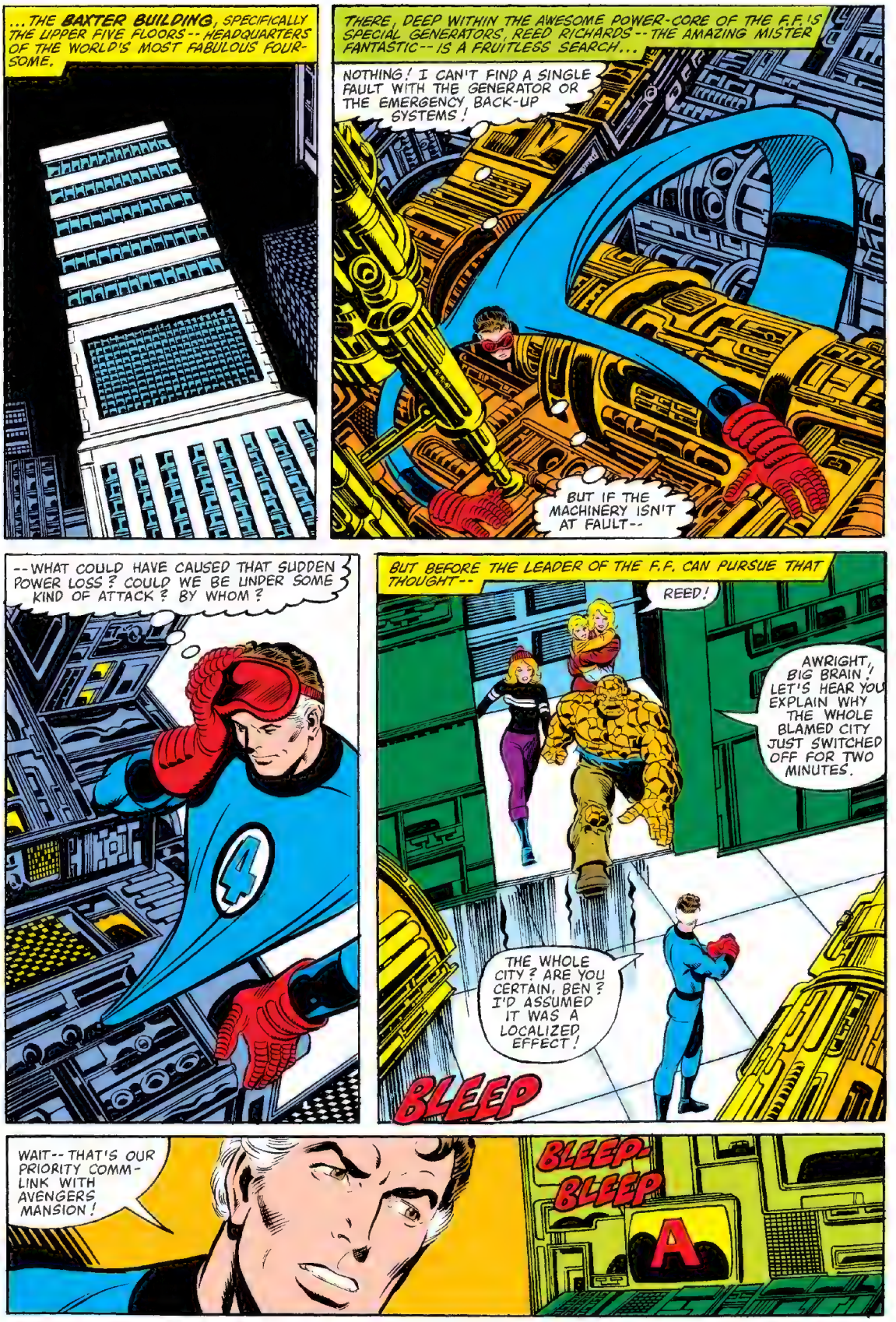

BUT WHILE THE CABBIE BROODS, HIS PASSENGERS' THOUGHTS ARE ON A MUCH LIGHTER FARE...
THIS IS GONNA BE THE BEST VACATION EVER! NO FANTASTIC FOUR...AN' NO HASSLES! JUST YOU AN' ME, AN' THE SUN!
OH, BEN, IT'S GOING TO BE WONDERFUL.
BUT...
HEY! WHATCHA SLOWIN' DOWN FOR? WE AIN'T NOWHERE NEAR THE AIRPORT!
S-SORRY, MR. GRIMM. IT AIN'T MY DOIN'! HONEST!
L-LOOK OUTSIDE.
AND AS THE THING DOES JUST THAT...
HOLEE---!
EVERYTHING'S STOPPED! ALL THE TRAFFIC ...HEY!
THE LIGHTS ARE ALL GOING OUT, TOO!
WHAT'S GOIN' ON? IT CAN'T BE A BLACK-OUT. THAT WOULDN'T AFFECT THE CARS...
WHAT IN SAM HILL?! THE CRANE ON THAT CONSTRUCTION SITE ON THE NEXT BLOCK...
IT'S FALLING!
THEY MUST'A BEEN WINCHING IT UP WHEN THE POWER CUT.
GRUNCH!
IF IT HITS THE STREET, IT COULD KILL ALL KINDS OF PEOPLE!

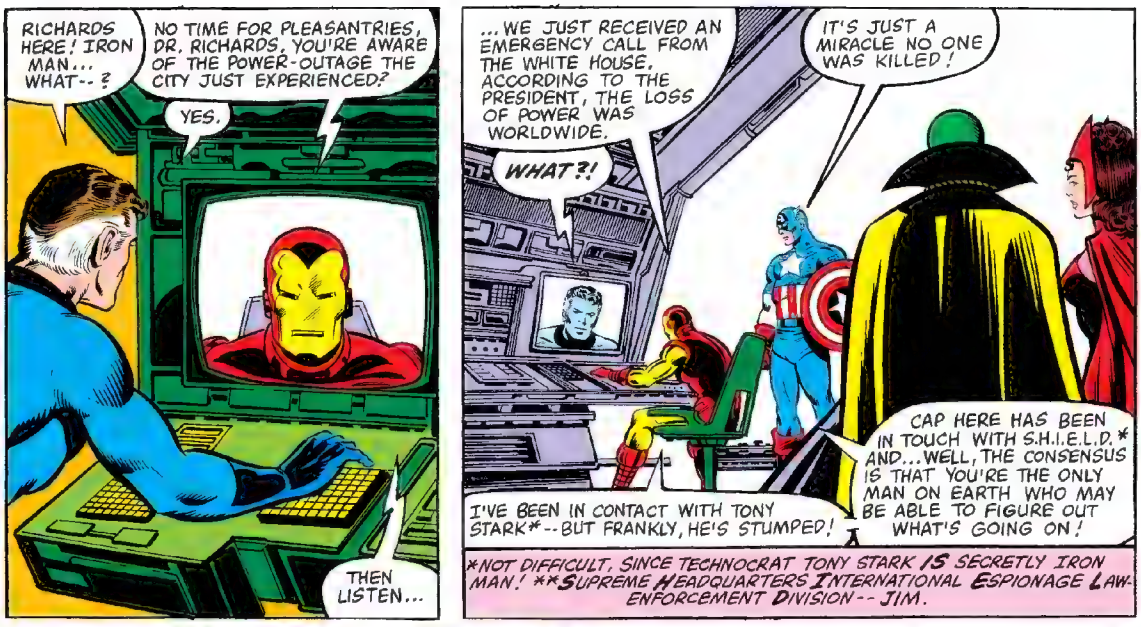

GOTTA TIME THIS JUST RIGHT-- I AIN'T IN THE HULK'S CLASS WHEN IT COMES TO INVULNERABILITY.
IF I GRAB IT WRONG, IT COULD GO RIGHT THROUGH ME.
AN' THAT AIN'T NO FITTING END FOR A BLUE-EYED IDOL OF MILLIONS...
GOT IT!
NOW ALL I GOTTA DO IS LOWER IT OUTTA HARM'S WAY.
THEN ME AN' ALICIA BETTER HIGH-TAIL IT BACK TO THE BAXTER BUILDING AND FIND OUT WHAT'S GOING ON...
AND, AS THE THING BEGINS TO SLOWLY LOWER HIS WEIGHTY BURDEN...
...WE LOOK SLIGHTLY BACK IN TIME AND A FEW BLOCKS AWAY TO FIND SUSAN STORM RICHARDS AND HER SON, FRANKLIN...
WELL, I DON'T KNOW ABOUT YOU, YOUNG MAN, BUT MOMMY'S JUST ABOUT READY TO SLEEP FOR A MONTH. WE'VE HAD A BUSY DAY!
BUT LOTSA FUN, HUH, MOMMA? LET'S GO SHOPPING AGAIN REAL SOON!
UH-HUH...


I'M AFRAID I DON'T HAVE YOUR INEXHAUSTABLE SUPPLY OF ENERGY, FRANKLIN. I...
MOMMA! THE LIGHTS ARE ALL GOING OUT!
NOT ANOTHER BLACK-OUT?
IT'S NOT JUST THE LIGHTS--EVERYTHING'S STOPPING, EVEN TRAFFIC.
AND, FIFTEEN STORIES ABOVE...
THE WINCH! IT'S GIVING WAY!
THE ELECTRIC BRAKE ISN'T STOPPING US!
WE'RE FALLING!
OH, MY LORD! THOSE MEN WILL BE KILLED!
UNLESS...
MOMMA! WHAT'S HAPPENING?
YOU STAY AND WATCH THOSE PACKAGES, FRANKLIN.
MOMMY HAS WORK TO DO...
WITH THE SWIFTNESS OF THOUGHT, THE DISTAFF MEMBER OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR REACHES OUT WITH HER UNIQUE POWER...
THERE, A NICE, SOFT, INVISIBLE FORCE-FIELD CUSHION, COURTESY OF THE INVISIBLE GIRL!
THE MEN ARE ALL RIGHT, JUST A LITTLE SHAKEN. I WON'T BE NEEDED HERE.
BUT I'VE GOT TO FIND OUT WHAT REED MAKES OF ALL THIS!
COME ON, FRANKLIN!

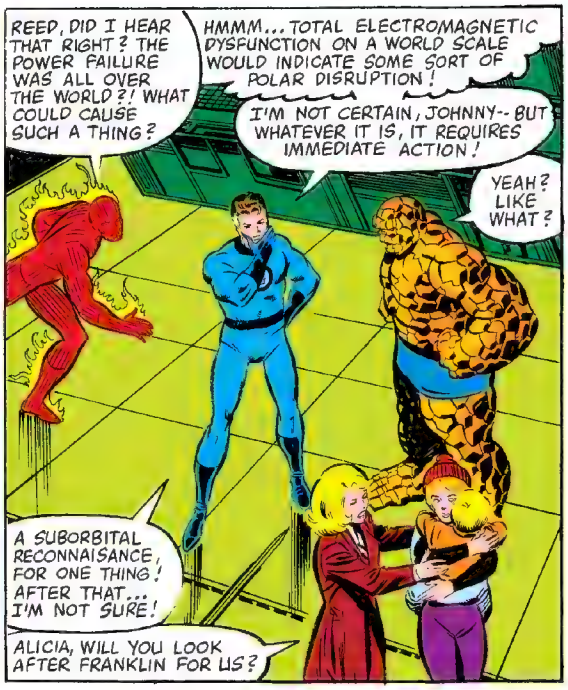

AND AS SUSAN RICHARDS HEADS FOR HOME, WE TURN BACK THE CLOCK ONCE AGAIN, AND LOOK EASTWARD...
...TO A GARAGE ON LONG ISLAND.
THERE, THAT OUGHTA DO IT!
SHE'S PURRIN' LIKE A DREAM.
YOU AIN'T LOST YOUR TOUCH, JOHNNY.
JUST LIKE RIDING A BIKE, PAL. SOME THINGS YOU NEVER FORGET.
AND YOU KNOW ME. I DON'T TINKER WITH HOT-RODS AS MUCH AS I USED TO, BUT THERE'S STILL ONLY ONE THING I LOVE MORE...
OH, YEAH? WHAT'S HER NAME?
BUT BEFORE JOHNNY STORM CAN MANAGE A SNAPPY COMEBACK.
HEY!
WHO TURNED OUT THE LIGHTS?
AT THAT MOMENT, FROM HIGH ABOVE...
PUTT PUTT
KOFF KOFF
LISTEN!
SOUNDS LIKE A SMALL AIR-CRAFT ENGINE CUTTIN' OUT.
IT'S RIGHT OVER-HEAD! IF IT CRASHES NEARBY IT COULD KILL DOZENS OF PEOPLE!
FLAME ON!


HATE TO BLOW A HOLE IN HARRY'S ROOF, BUT... HEY!
THE POWER'S OUT ALL OVER THE NEIGHBORHOOD! EVERYTHING'S DARK!
THERE'S THE PLANE, IF I WERE THE THING, I'D JUST CATCH IT.
BUT I'M NOT THAT STRONG! SO I'LL JUST HAVE TO USE MY HEAD... AND MY FLAME...
...LIKE SO!
FASTER AND FASTER, THE BLAZING YOUTH SPINS BENEATH THE STRICKEN CRAFT, GENERATING A TREMENDOUS UPDRAFT TO KEEP IT ALOFT--
...UNTIL, -FINALLY...
THE POWER'S COME BACK ON. THE TORCH SURE SAVED MY SKIN.
THE PILOT LOOKS OKAY...
...AND THE LIGHTS ARE COMING BACK ON.
I DON'T KNOW WHAT CAUSED ALL THIS, BUT I THINK I KNOW WHO CAN TELL ME!
SO THINKING, THE HUMAN TORCH ROCKETS TOWARDS MANHATTAN AND...

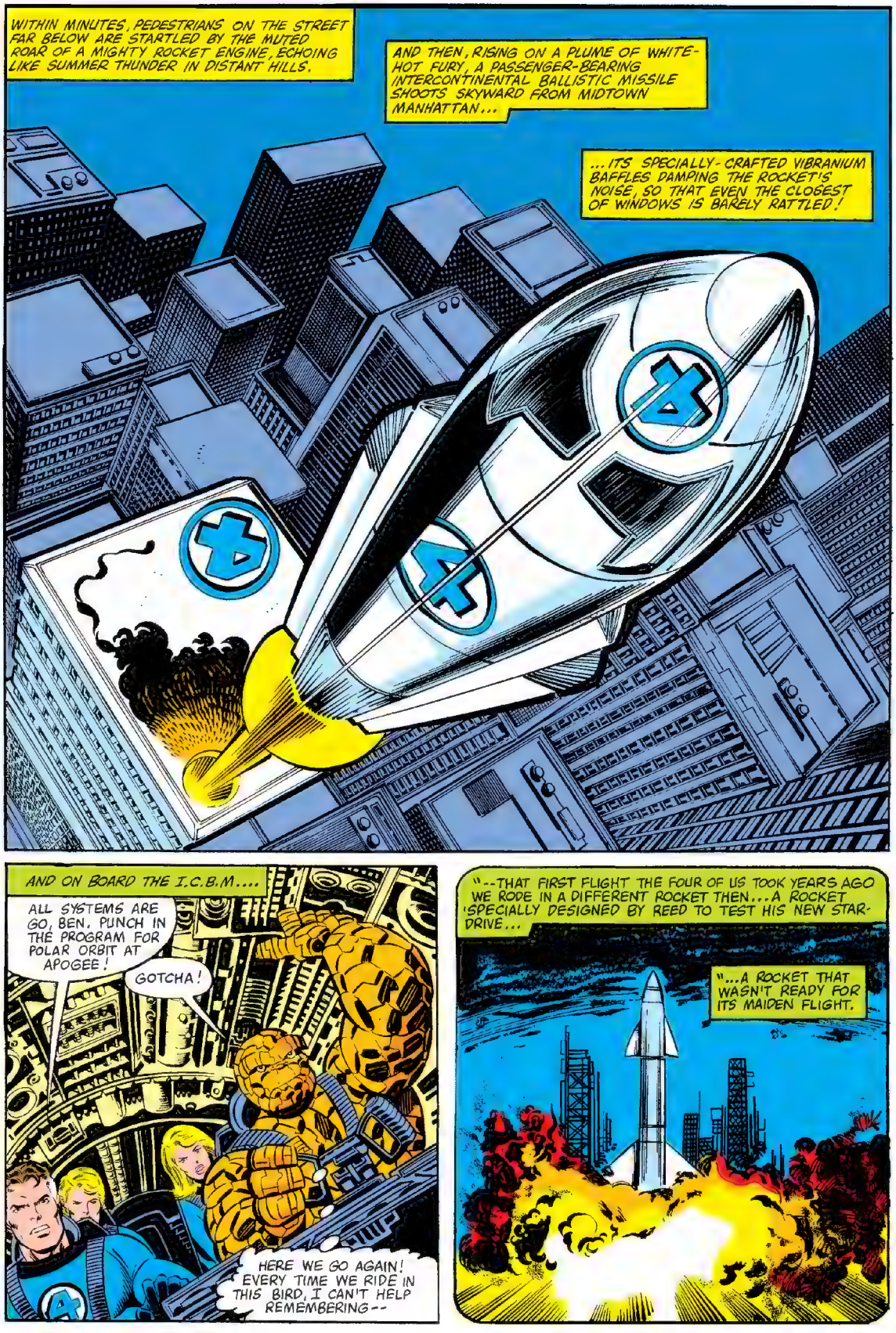

...THE BAXTER BUILDING, SPECIFICALLY THE UPPER FIVE FLOORS -- HEADQUARTERS OF THE WORLD'S MOST FABULOUS FOURSOME.
THERE, DEEP WITHIN THE AWESOME POWER-CORE OF THE F.F.'S SPECIAL GENERATORS, REED RICHARDS -- THE AMAZING MISTER FANTASTIC -- IS A FRUITLESS SEARCH...
NOTHING! I CAN'T FIND A SINGLE FAULT WITH THE GENERATOR OR THE EMERGENCY BACK-UP SYSTEMS!
BUT IF THE MACHINERY ISN'T AT FAULT--
--WHAT COULD HAVE CAUSED THAT SUDDEN POWER LOSS? COULD WE BE UNDER SOME KIND OF ATTACK? BY WHOM?
BUT BEFORE THE LEADER OF THE F.F. CAN PURSUE THAT THOUGHT--
REED!
AWRIGHT, BIG BRAIN! LET'S HEAR YOU EXPLAIN WHY THE WHOLE BLAMED CITY JUST SWITCHED OFF FOR TWO MINUTES.
THE WHOLE CITY? ARE YOU CERTAIN, BEN? I'D ASSUMED IT WAS A LOCALIZED EFFECT!
BLEEP
WAIT -- THAT'S OUR PRIORITY COMM-LINK WITH AVENGERS MANSION!
BLEEP-BLEEP
A


RICHARDS HERE! IRON MAN... WHAT--?
NO TIME FOR PLEASANTRIES, DR. RICHARDS. YOU'RE AWARE OF THE POWER-OUTAGE THE CITY JUST EXPERIENCED?
YES.
THEN LISTEN...
...WE JUST RECEIVED AN EMERGENCY CALL FROM THE WHITE HOUSE. ACCORDING TO THE PRESIDENT, THE LOSS OF POWER WAS WORLDWIDE.
WHAT?!
IT'S JUST A MIRACLE NO ONE WAS KILLED!
I'VE BEEN IN CONTACT WITH TONY STARK*--BUT FRANKLY, HE'S STUMPED!
CAP HERE HAS BEEN IN TOUCH WITH S.H.I.E.L.D.* AND...WELL, THE CONSENSUS IS THAT YOU'RE THE ONLY MAN ON EARTH WHO MAY BE ABLE TO FIGURE OUT WHAT'S GOING ON!
*NOT DIFFICULT, SINCE TECHNOCRAT TONY STARK IS SECRETLY IRON MAN! **SUPREME HEADQUARTERS INTERNATIONAL ESPIONAGE LAW-ENFORCEMENT DIVISION--JIM.

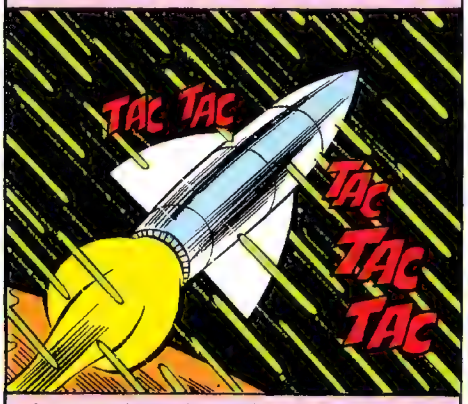
I SEE. WELL, I HOPE I CAN LIVE UP TO YOUR FAITH IN ME, IRON MAN. I PRESUME THAT THE FULL RESOURCES OF THE AVENGERS WILL BE AT MY DISPOSAL, SHOULD THEY BE REQUIRED.
OF COURSE. IRON MAN OUT!
SOUNDS LIKE WE JUST PULLED ONE TALL ORDER, STRETCHO. YOU THINK WE'RE UP TO IT?
I PRAY WE ARE, OLD FRIEND.


REED, DID I HEAR THAT RIGHT? THE POWER FAILURE WAS ALL OVER THE WORLD?! WHAT COULD CAUSE SUCH A THING?
HMMM...TOTAL ELECTROMAGNETIC DYSFUNCTION ON A WORLD SCALE WOULD INDICATE SOME SORT OF POLAR DISRUPTION!
I'M NOT CERTAIN, JOHNNY--BUT WHATEVER IT IS, IT REQUIRES IMMEDIATE ACTION!
YEAH? LIKE WHAT?
A SUBORBITAL RECONNAISANCE, FOR ONE THING! AFTER THAT... I'M NOT SURE!
ALICIA, WILL YOU LOOK AFTER FRANKLIN FOR US?

I SHALL. GOOD LUCK TO YOU ALL... AND GODSPEED!
OKAY, REED... ALICIA'S OUT OF EARSHOT. WHAT WERE YOU HOLDIN' BACK?
MY GRAVEST FEARS, BEN. IF I'M RIGHT ABOUT THE CAUSE OF THESE POWER FAILURES, IT COULD MEAN THE END OF CIVILIZATION AS WE KNOW IT!

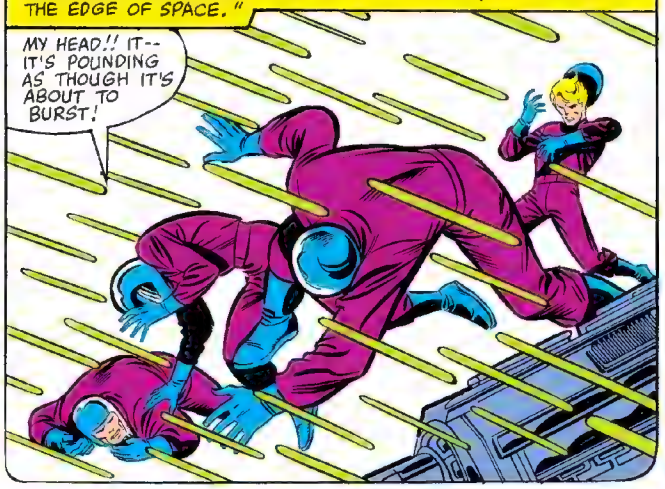

WITHIN MINUTES, PEDESTRIANS ON THE STREET FAR BELOW ARE STARTLED BY THE MUTED ROAR OF A MIGHTY ROCKET ENGINE, ECHOING LIKE SUMMER THUNDER IN DISTANT HILLS.
AND THEN, RISING ON A PLUME OF WHITE-HOT FURY, A PASSENGER-BEARING INTERCONTINENTAL BALLISTIC MISSILE SHOOTS SKYWARD FROM MIDTOWN MANHATTAN...
...ITS SPECIALLY-CRAFTED VIBRANIUM BAFFLES DAMPING THE ROCKET'S NOISE, SO THAT EVEN THE CLOSEST OF WINDOWS IS BARELY RATTLED!
AND ON BOARD THE I.C.B.M....
ALL SYSTEMS ARE GO, BEN. PUNCH IN THE PROGRAM FOR POLAR ORBIT AT APOGEE!
GOTCHA!
HERE WE GO AGAIN! EVERY TIME WE RIDE IN THIS BIRD, I CAN'T HELP REMEMBERING--
"--THAT FIRST FLIGHT THE FOUR OF US TOOK YEARS AGO WE RODE IN A DIFFERENT ROCKET THEN...A ROCKET 'SPECIALLY DESIGNED BY REED TO TEST HIS NEW STAR-DRIVE...
"...A ROCKET THAT WASN'T READY FOR ITS MAIDEN FLIGHT.

"REED WAS CONVINCED THAT WE HAD TO SNEAK A FLIGHT BEFORE AN APPROPRIATIONS CUT-BACK KILLED HIS FUNDING. AND SUE AND JOHNNY CAME ALONG TO PROVE HOW SAFE THE DRIVE WAS.

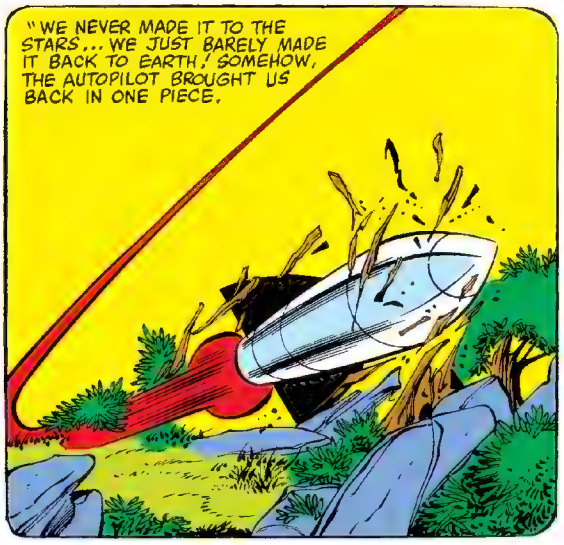


"BUT THE DANGERS OF AN EXPERIMENTAL STAR-DRIVE WERE NOTHING COMPARED TO THE COSMIC RAY STORM WE RAN INTO!

"WE ALL KNEW THE SHIP WASN'T SHIELDED WELL ENOUGH... WE THOUGHT WE KNEW THE RISKS. BUT WE COULD NEVER HAVE GUESSED WHAT THOSE RAYS WOULD DO TO US, OUT THERE ON THE EDGE OF SPACE."



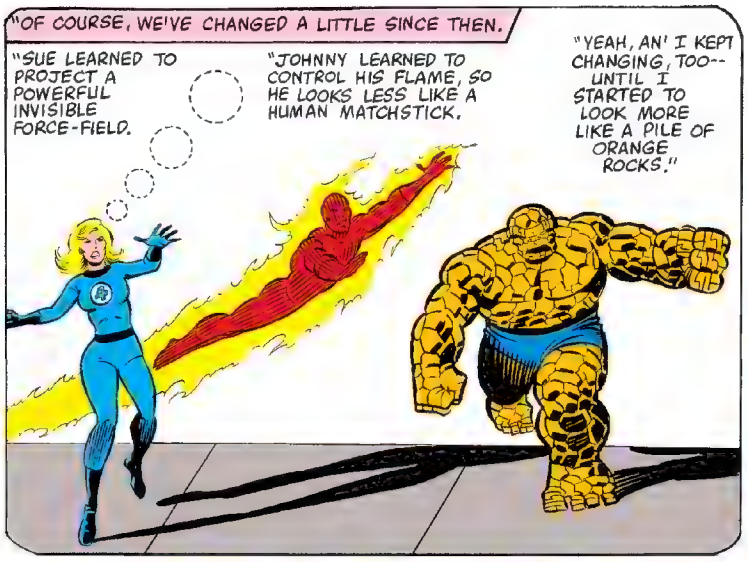
"WE NEVER MADE IT TO THE STARS... WE JUST BARELY MADE IT BACK TO EARTH! SOMEHOW, THE AUTOPILOT BROUGHT US BACK IN ONE PIECE.

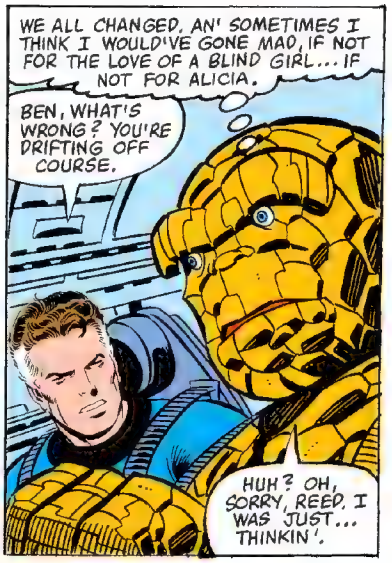


"AND SOMEHOW, WE WALKED AWAY FROM THE CRASH."

"THOSE RAYS DID PLENTY! THEY MADE A HUMAN RUBBER BAND OUTTA REED... AN' TURNED SUZIE INTO AN INVISIBLE GIRL AND HER BROTHER JOHNNY INTO A HUMAN TORCH!

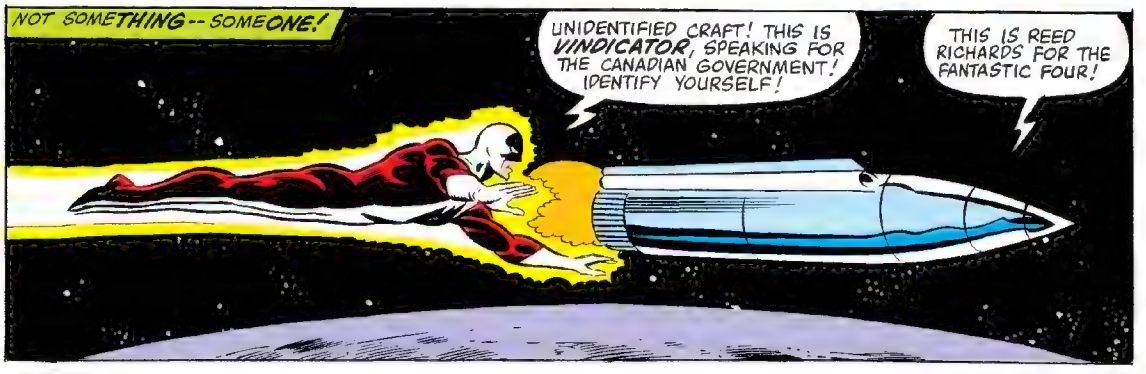
"AND ME... THEY MADE ME A LUMPY ORANGE MONSTER. A THING!

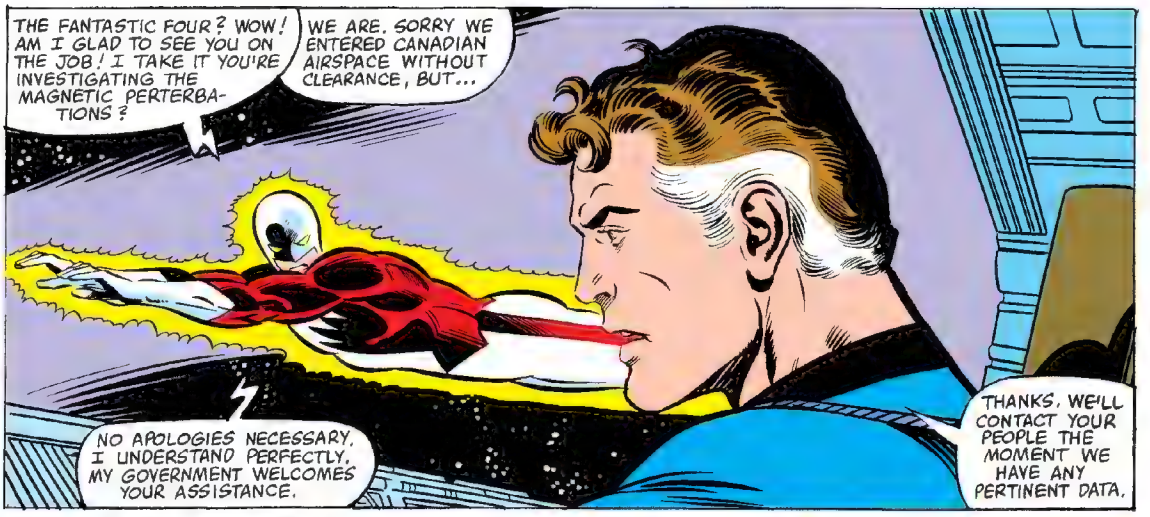

"OF COURSE, WE'VE CHANGED A LITTLE SINCE THEN.
"SUE LEARNED TO PROJECT A POWERFUL INVISIBLE FORCE-FIELD.
"JOHNNY LEARNED TO CONTROL HIS FLAME, SO HE LOOKS LESS LIKE A HUMAN MATCHSTICK.
"YEAH, AN' I KEPT CHANGING, TOO-- UNTIL I STARTED TO LOOK MORE LIKE A PILE OF ORANGE ROCKS."

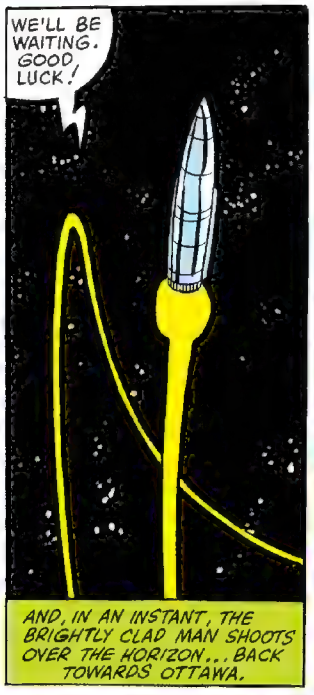

WE ALL CHANGED, AN' SOMETIMES I THINK I WOULD'VE GONE MAD, IF NOT FOR THE LOVE OF A BLIND GIRL... IF NOT FOR ALICIA.
BEN, WHAT'S WRONG? YOU'RE DRIFTING OFF COURSE.
HUH? OH, SORRY, REED. I WAS JUST... THINKIN'.

SUDDENLY...
HOLY COW! WHAT THE HECK IS THAT?!
THAT'S WHAT WE'RE LOOKING FOR, BEN. SOME FORCE IS ALTERING THE MAGNETIC FIELDS OF THE EARTH, EVEN CAUSING THEM TO GROW VISIBLE.

THAT "NORTHERN LIGHTS" EFFECT IS A DIRECT RESULT OF SOME FORCE TAMPERING WITH THE FIELD FLOW OF THE POLES. THE POWER-OUTS WERE ANOTHER MANIFESTATION.
REED! LOOK AT THE SCANNER! SOMETHING IS CLOSING WITH US-- FAST!

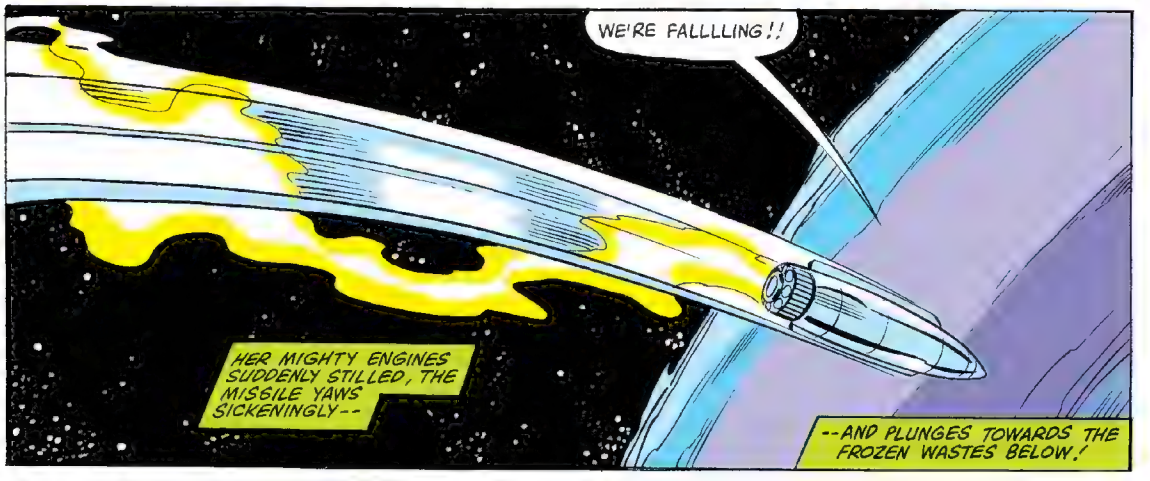

NOT SOMETHING-- SOMEONE!
UNIDENTIFIED CRAFT! THIS IS VINDICATOR, SPEAKING FOR THE CANADIAN GOVERNMENT! IDENTIFY YOURSELF!
THIS IS REED RICHARDS FOR THE FANTASTIC FOUR!


THE FANTASTIC FOUR? WOW! AM I GLAD TO SEE YOU ON THE JOB! I TAKE IT YOU'RE INVESTIGATING THE MAGNETIC PERTERBATIONS?
WE ARE. SORRY WE ENTERED CANADIAN AIRSPACE WITHOUT CLEARANCE, BUT...
NO APOLOGIES NECESSARY. I UNDERSTAND PERFECTLY. MY GOVERNMENT WELCOMES YOUR ASSISTANCE.
THANKS. WE'LL CONTACT YOUR PEOPLE THE MOMENT WE HAVE ANY PERTINENT DATA.

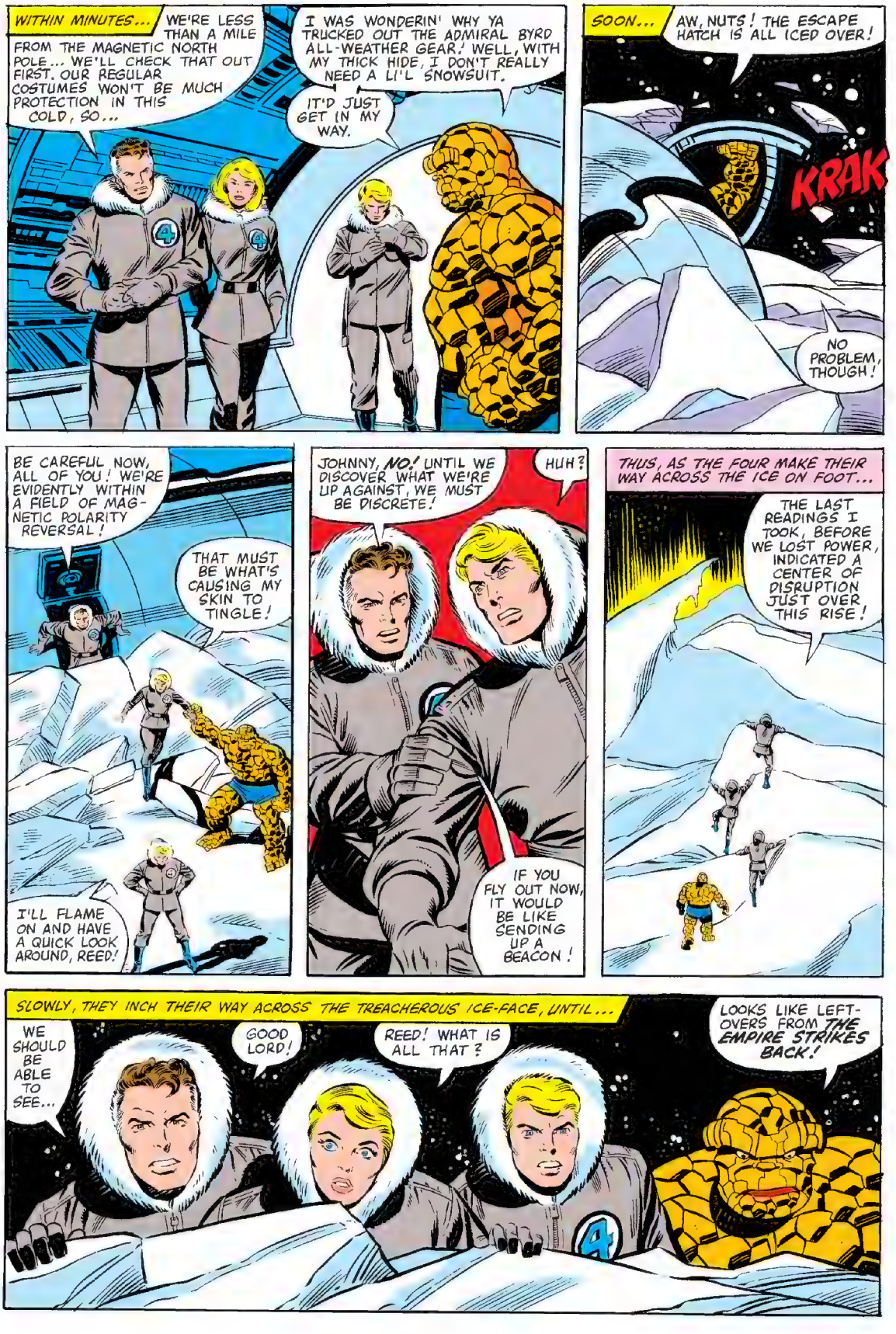

WE'LL BE WAITING. GOOD LUCK!
AND, IN AN INSTANT, THE BRIGHTLY CLAD MAN SHOOTS OVER THE HORIZON... BACK TOWARDS OTTAWA.

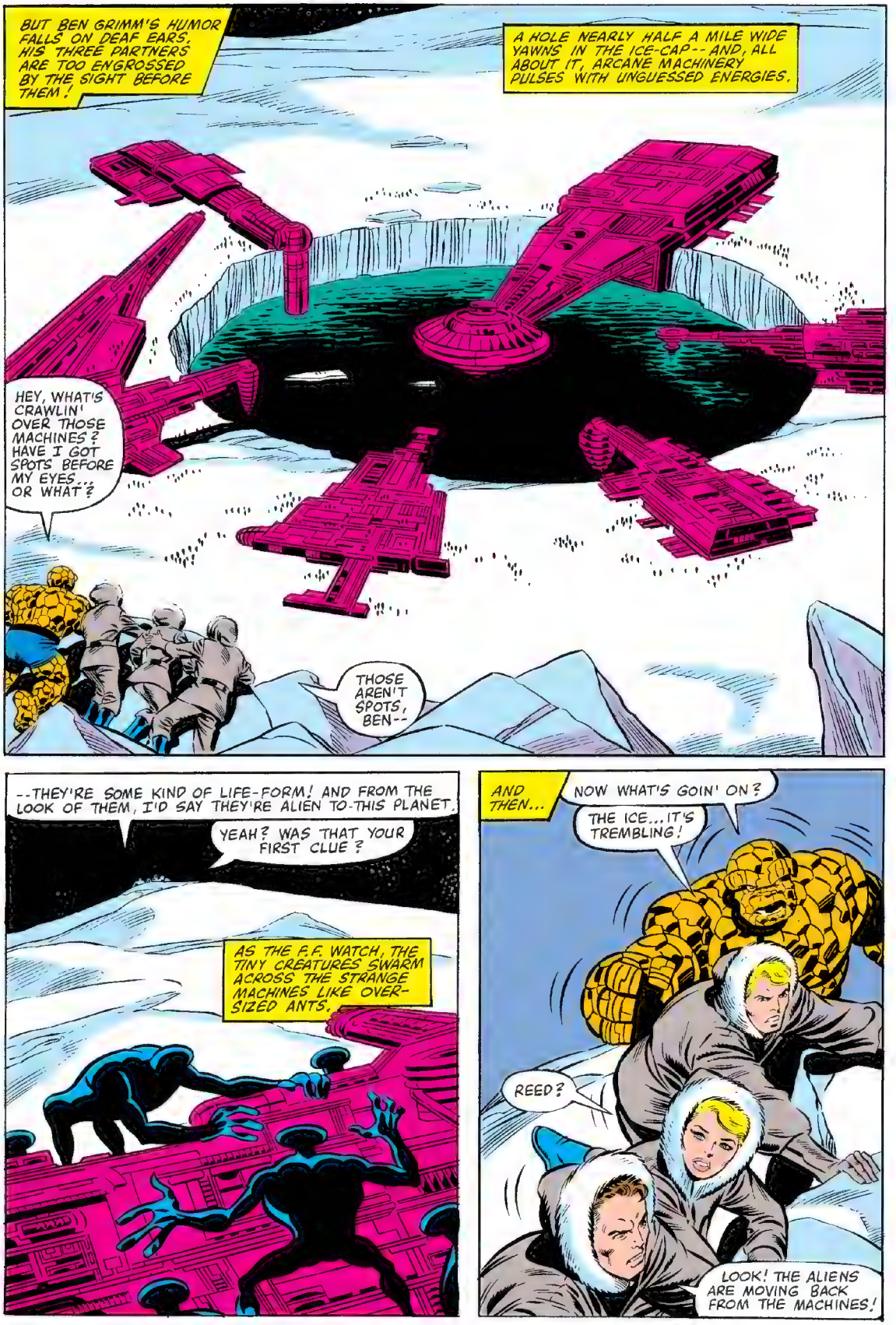
INTERESTING. MY SENSORS INDICATE THAT VINDICATOR'S UNIFORM IS POWERED BY ELECTROMAGNETIC RADIATION. IF THERE'D BEEN ANOTHER POWER OUTAGE WHILE HE WAS PURSUING US, HE COULD HAVE FALLEN TO HIS DEATH! HE'S A BRAVE MAN!
YEAH, WELL... HE'S SUPPOSED TO BE A HERO, AIN'T HE?

SECONDS WHIZ BY, TURNING INTO MINUTES, AND THEN...
REED! THE CONTROLS AREN'T RESPONDING!
THE POWER'S CUT AGAIN!


WE'RE FALLLLING!!
HER MIGHTY ENGINES SUDDENLY STILLED, THE MISSILE YAWS SICKENINGLY--
--AND PLUNGES TOWARDS THE FROZEN WASTES BELOW!

BEN! DO SOMETHING! YOU'RE A PILOT...
GET READY TO FLY SUE AN' REED TO SAFETY, KID. THERE'S NOTHING I CAN DO, UNLESS THIS BIRD GROWS WINGS.
SUDDENLY, AS IF ON COMMAND...
THE INERTIA-POWERED EMERGENCY WINGS ARE DEPLOYING! SORRY, BEN... I FORGOT TO TELL YOU I RECENTLY INSTALLED THEM!
THANKS A LOT, STRETCH--
--YOU CAN PAY FOR THE TREATMENT OF THE CARDIAC ARREST I JUST HAD!
MEANWHILE, HANG ON TIGHT, FOLKS!
EVEN WITH WINGS, THIS BABY FLIES LIKE A TRUCK.
HIS GREAT ORANGE PAWS STRAINING AT THE CONTROLS, BEN GRIMM FIGHTS TO KEEP THE MISSILE'S NOSE UP!
SK-ASH
HE IS ONLY PARTIALLY SUCCESSFUL!
HOWEVER...
BEN, HITTING THAT OUTCROPPING SLOWED US DOWN!
YEAH, KID. LOOKS LIKE OUR LUCK IS STILL GOOD... WE'RE GONNA WALK AWAY FROM ANOTHER CRASH!

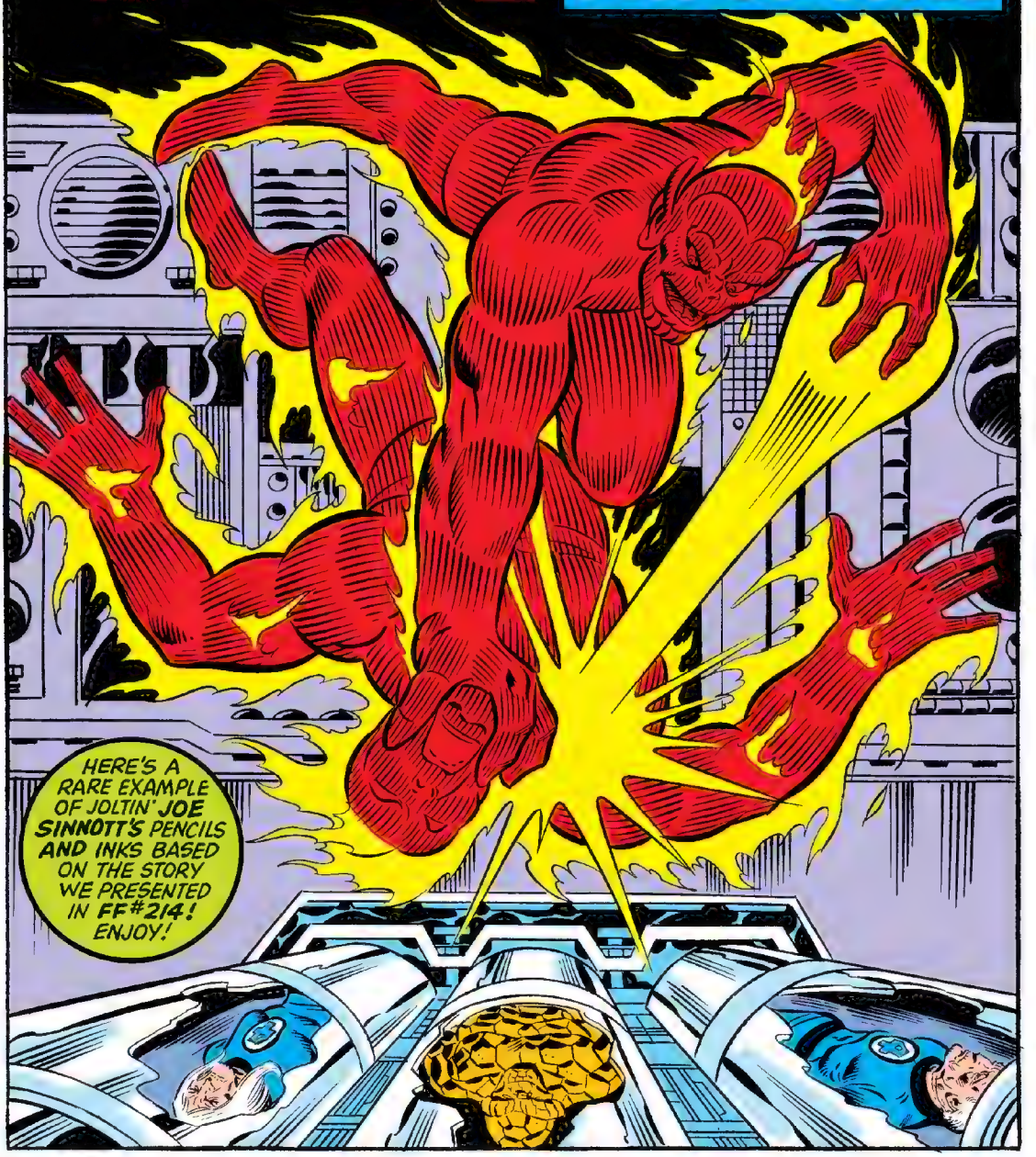

WITHIN MINUTES...
WE'RE LESS THAN A MILE FROM THE MAGNETIC NORTH POLE... WE'LL CHECK THAT OUT FIRST. OUR REGULAR COSTUMES WON'T BE MUCH PROTECTION IN THIS COLD, SO...
I WAS WONDERIN' WHY YA TRUCKED OUT THE ADMIRAL BYRD ALL-WEATHER GEAR! WELL, WITH MY THICK HIDE, I DON'T REALLY NEED A LI'L SNOWSUIT.
IT'D JUST GET IN MY WAY.
SOON...
AW, NUTS! THE ESCAPE HATCH IS ALL ICED OVER!
KRAK
NO PROBLEM, THOUGH!
BE CAREFUL NOW, ALL OF YOU! WE'RE EVIDENTLY WITHIN A FIELD OF MAGNETIC POLARITY REVERSAL!
THAT MUST BE WHAT'S CAUSING MY SKIN TO TINGLE!
I'LL FLAME ON AND HAVE A QUICK LOOK AROUND, REED!
JOHNNY, NO! UNTIL WE DISCOVER WHAT WE'RE UP AGAINST, WE MUST BE DISCRETE!
HUH?
IF YOU FLY OUT NOW, IT WOULD BE LIKE SENDING UP A BEACON!
THUS, AS THE FOUR MAKE THEIR WAY ACROSS THE ICE ON FOOT...
THE LAST READINGS I TOOK, BEFORE WE LOST POWER, INDICATED A CENTER OF DISRUPTION JUST OVER THIS RISE!
SLOWLY, THEY INCH THEIR WAY ACROSS THE TREACHEROUS ICE-FACE, UNTIL...
WE SHOULD BE ABLE TO SEE...
GOOD LORD!
REED! WHAT IS ALL THAT?
LOOKS LIKE LEFTOVERS FROM THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK!


BUT BEN GRIMM'S HUMOR FALLS ON DEAF EARS. HIS THREE PARTNERS ARE TOO ENGROSSED BY THE SIGHT BEFORE THEM!
A HOLE NEARLY HALF A MILE WIDE YAWNS IN THE ICE-CAP-- AND, ALL ABOUT IT, ARCANE MACHINERY PULSES WITH UNGUESSED ENERGIES.
HEY, WHAT'S CRAWLIN' OVER THOSE MACHINES? HAVE I GOT SPOTS BEFORE MY EYES... OR WHAT?
THOSE AREN'T SPOTS, BEN--
--THEY'RE SOME KIND OF LIFE-FORM! AND FROM THE LOOK OF THEM, I'D SAY THEY'RE ALIEN TO-THIS PLANET.
YEAH? WAS THAT YOUR FIRST CLUE?
AS THE F.F. WATCH, THE TINY CREATURES SWARM ACROSS THE STRANGE MACHINES LIKE OVER-SIZED ANTS.
AND THEN...
NOW WHAT'S GOIN' ON?
THE ICE... IT'S TREMBLING!
REED?
LOOK! THE ALIENS ARE MOVING BACK FROM THE MACHINES!

WITHOUT WARNING, THE TREMORS SUDDENLY CEASE. FOR THE SPACE OF ONE LONG BREATHLESS HEARTBEAT, THE ICE IS DEATHLY QUIET. AND THEN...
SHROOM
KNIFING SKYWARD, THE MILE-HIGH CRYSTALLINE TOWER LOOMS OVER THE AWESTRUCK QUARTET. AND AS AN EERIE RADIATION BEGINS TO CRACKLE ABOUT ITS PEAK--
--THERE IS LITTLE DOUBT IN THEIR MINDS THAT THIS GLEAMING TOWER COULD WELL BECOME THE TOMBSTONE OF ALL MANKIND!
NEXT ISSUE: THE FEAR-FROUGHT CONCLUSION!!

Fantastic Four®

PIN-UP PAGE



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Reed Richards! Ben Grimm! Sue Richards! Johnny Storm! Together they braved the unknown terrors of outer space and were changed into something more than human! MR. FANTASTIC! THE THING! THE INVISIBLE GIRL! THE HUMAN TORCH! And now the world will never again be the same!

Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE FANTASTIC FOUR!®

TOWER OF CRYSTAL... DREAMS OF GLASS!

IT BEGAN WITH A WORLD-WIDE POWER FAILURE WHICH AFFECTED ALL ELECTRICAL DEVICES... CARS, PLANES, EVERYTHING!

INVESTIGATING THE MYSTERIOUS ENERGY BLACKOUT, THE FANTASTIC FOUR CAME HERE, TO THE ARCTIC, NOT FAR FROM EARTH'S MAGNETIC NORTH POLE--

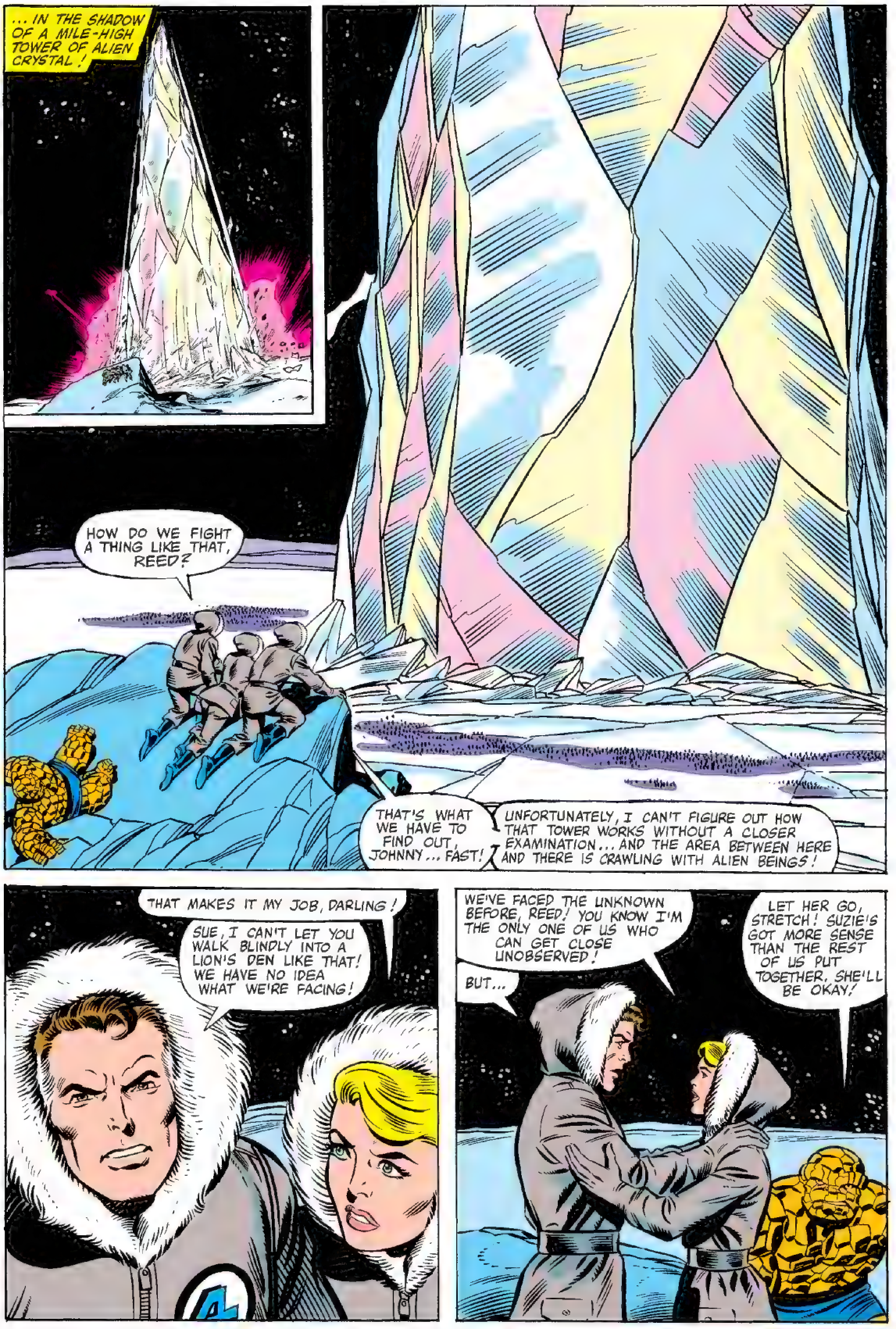
--AND HERE THEY FOUND AN ALIEN CREATION WHICH THREATENS TO REVERSE THE POLARITY OF THE PLANET'S ELECTROMAGNETIC FIELD!

REED, YOU CAN'T BE SERIOUS!

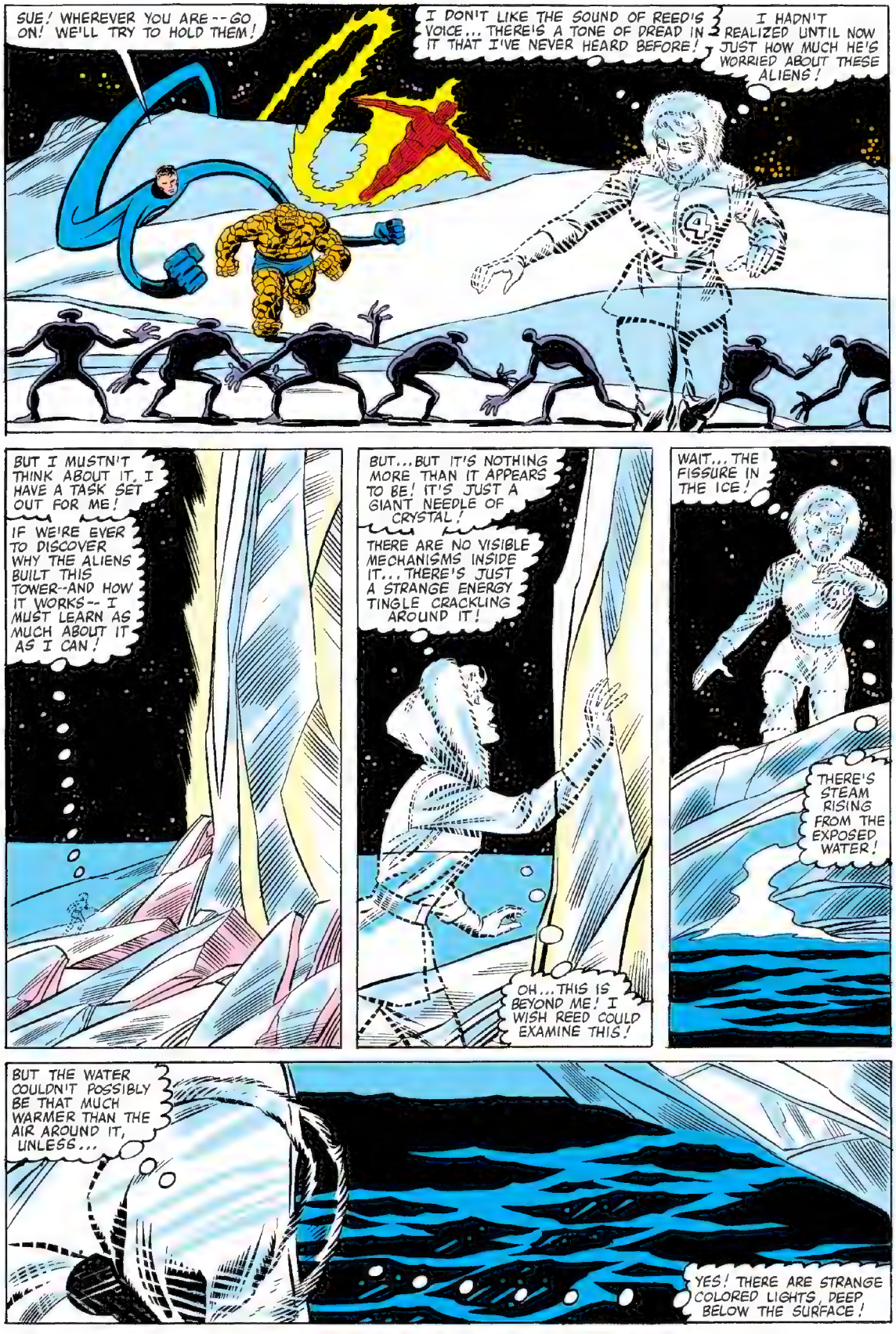
I WOULDN'T JOKE ABOUT A THING LIKE THIS JOHNNY! IF WE CAN'T STOP THE PROCESS, THAT TOWER COULD CONCEIVABLY DESTROY ALL LIFE ON EARTH!

HERE IS WHERE IT MAY ALL END...

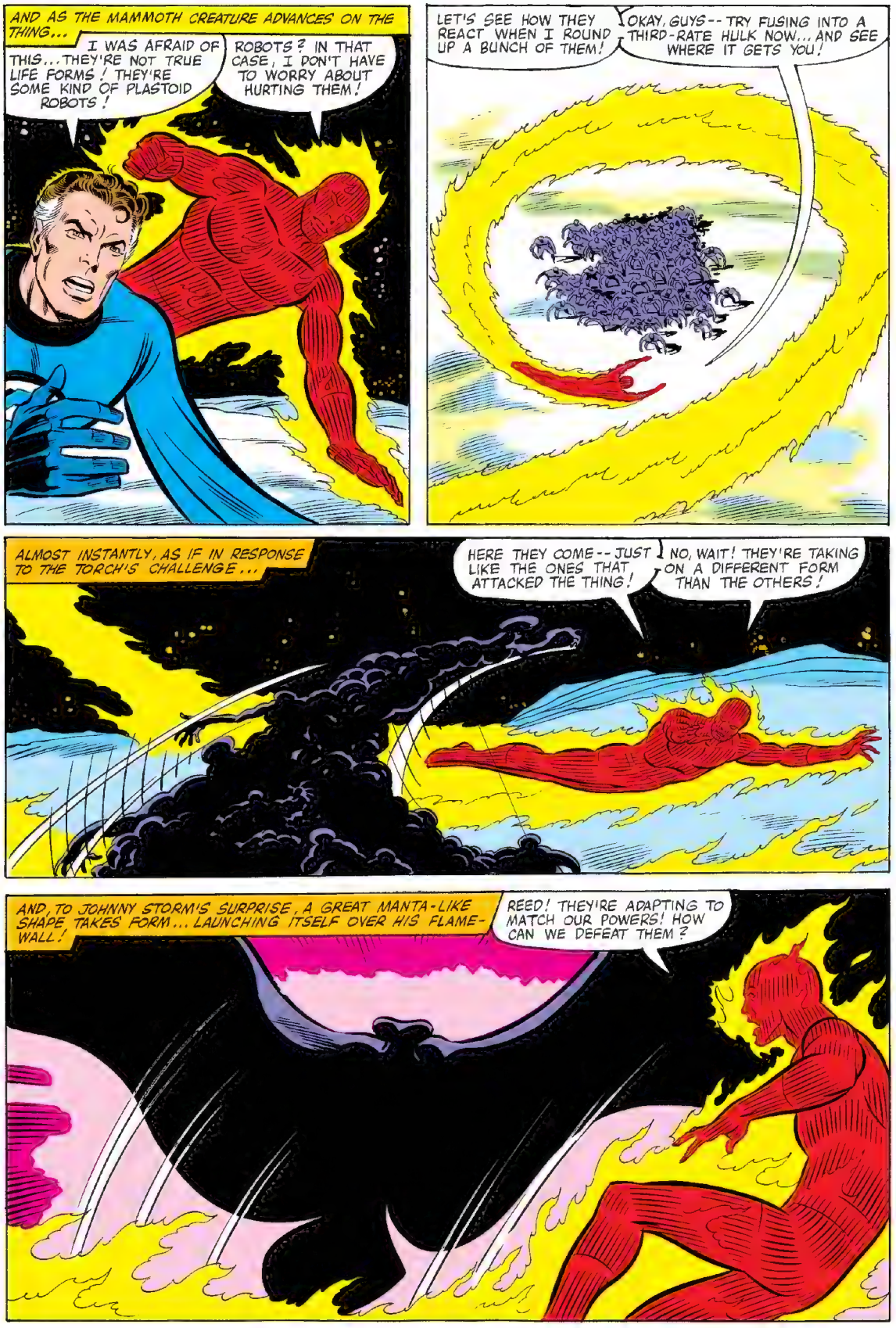
JOHN BYRNE • WORDS & FORM
JOE SINNOTT • EMBELLISHMENT & EFFECT
JIM NOVAK • LETTERS & TITLES
C. GAFFORD • COLOR & HUE
JIM SALICRUP • GUIDANCE & COUNSEL
JIM SHOOTER • ADVICE & CONSENT

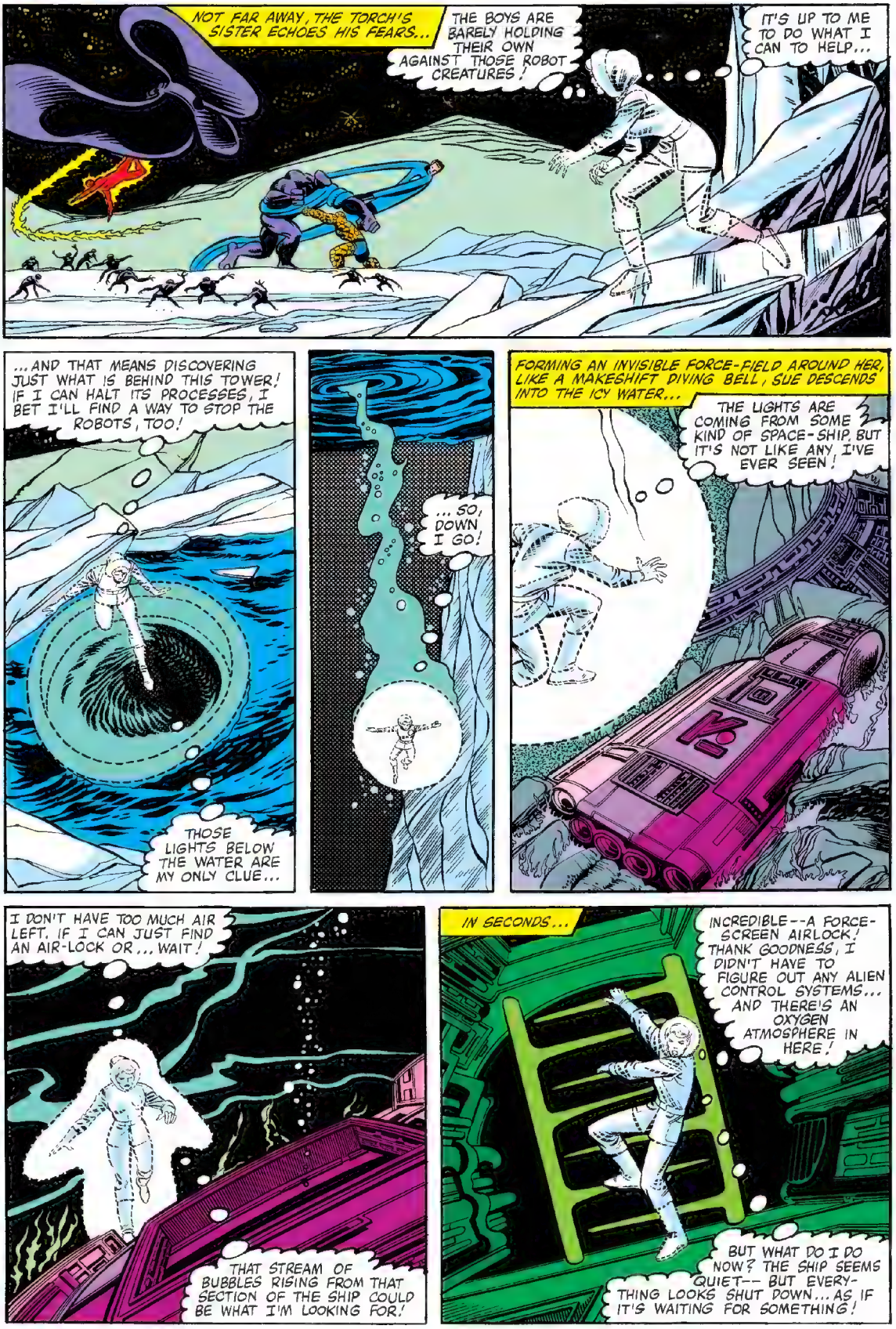

... IN THE SHADOW OF A MILE-HIGH TOWER OF ALIEN CRYSTAL!
HOW DO WE FIGHT A THING LIKE THAT, REED?
THAT'S WHAT WE HAVE TO FIND OUT, JOHNNY... FAST!
UNFORTUNATELY, I CAN'T FIGURE OUT HOW THAT TOWER WORKS WITHOUT A CLOSER EXAMINATION... AND THE AREA BETWEEN HERE AND THERE IS CRAWLING WITH ALIEN BEINGS!
THAT MAKES IT MY JOB, DARLING!
SUE, I CAN'T LET YOU WALK BLINDLY INTO A LION'S DEN LIKE THAT! WE HAVE NO IDEA WHAT WE'RE FACING!
WE'VE FACED THE UNKNOWN BEFORE, REED! YOU KNOW I'M THE ONLY ONE OF US WHO CAN GET CLOSE UNOBSERVED!
BUT...
LET HER GO, STRETCH! SUZIE'S GOT MORE SENSE THAN THE REST OF US PUT TOGETHER. SHE'LL BE OKAY!

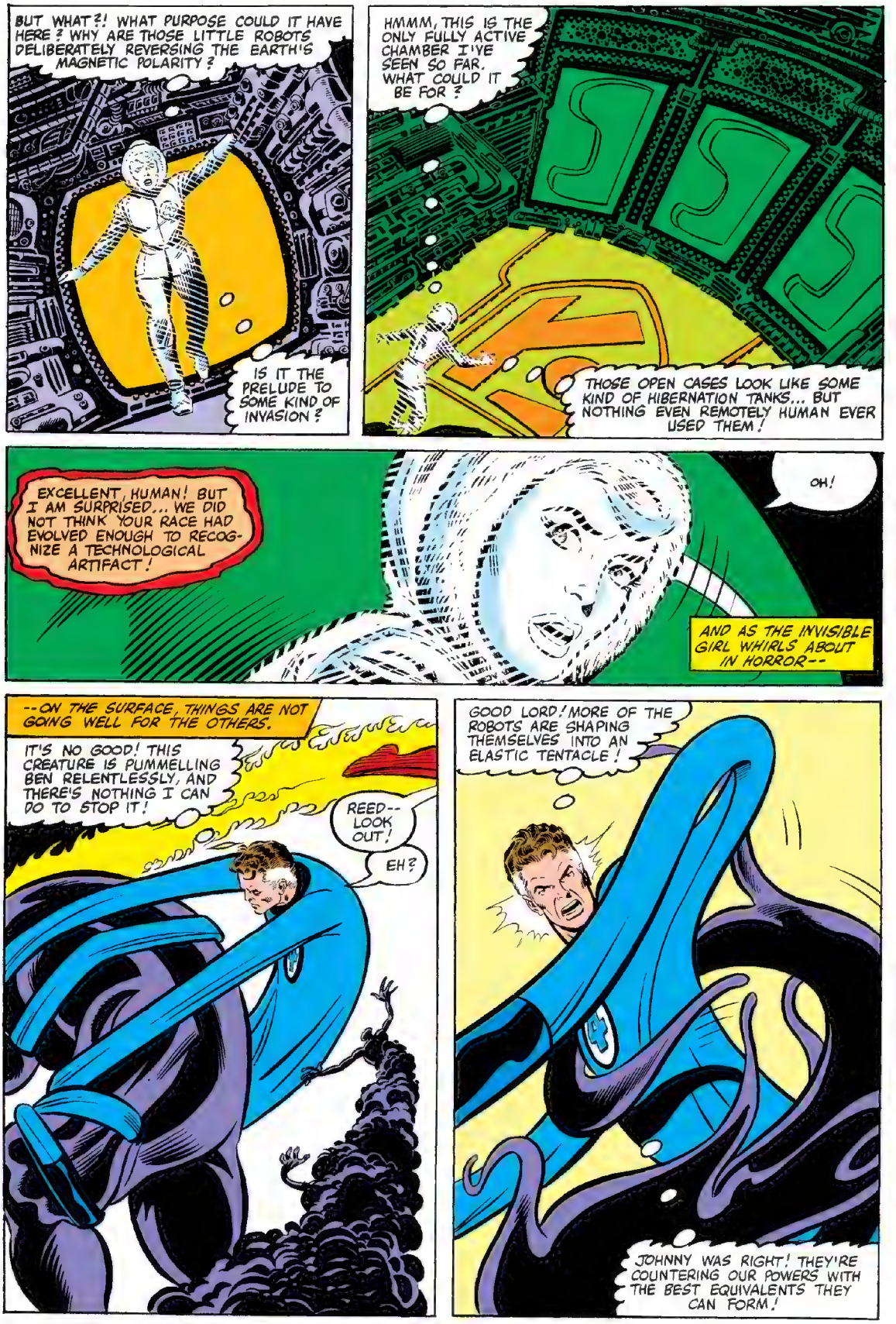
VERY WELL. BUT STAY INVISIBLE AND DON'T DROP YOUR GUARD FOR AN INSTANT, SUE! AND IF ANYTHING GOES WRONG--!
OH, DON'T FUSS SO, REED! I'M PERFECTLY CAPABLE OF PROTECTING MYSELF!
I JUST WISH I WAS AS CONFIDENT AS I SOUND!
AND, AS THE INVISIBLE GIRL APPROACHES THE CRYSTAL TOWER...
THE ALIENS HAVE BROKEN OFF INTO GROUPS... AND SOME OF THEM ARE FORMING A PROTECTIVE CIRCLE AROUND THE TOWER'S PERIMETER!
THEY'RE SO SMALL-- ALMOST CUTE LOOKING! IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE THAT THEY COULD BE A THREAT!
WELL, ANYWAY, THEY CAN'T POSSIBLY HURT WHAT THEY CAN'T SEE!
BUT THEN...
WREEEEEEEEEEEE
OH, NO!
AN ALARM! SOMEHOW, THEY'VE DETECTED SUE!
LET'S GO! WE HAVE TO DISTRACT THEM!
BUT TRY NOT TO HARM THEM... OR THE TOWER, UNTIL WE FIND OUT MORE ABOUT HOW IT WORKS!
FLAME ON!
I'LL DO MY BEST, STRETCHO-- BUT IF THEY GET ROUGH WITH SUZIE, THERE'S GONNA BE LITTLE ALIEN PANCAKES ALL OVER THE NORTH POLE!


SUE! WHEREVER YOU ARE--GO ON! WE'LL TRY TO HOLD THEM!
I DON'T LIKE THE SOUND OF REED'S VOICE... THERE'S A TONE OF DREAD IN IT THAT I'VE NEVER HEARD BEFORE!
I HADN'T REALIZED UNTIL NOW JUST HOW MUCH HE'S WORRIED ABOUT THESE ALIENS!
BUT I MUSTN'T THINK ABOUT IT. I HAVE A TASK SET OUT FOR ME!
IF WE'RE EVER TO DISCOVER WHY THE ALIENS BUILT THIS TOWER--AND HOW IT WORKS-- I MUST LEARN AS MUCH ABOUT IT AS I CAN!
BUT...BUT IT'S NOTHING MORE THAN IT APPEARS TO BE! IT'S JUST A GIANT NEEDLE OF CRYSTAL!
THERE ARE NO VISIBLE MECHANISMS INSIDE IT...THERE'S JUST A STRANGE ENERGY TINGLE CRACKLING AROUND IT!
OH...THIS IS BEYOND ME! I WISH REED COULD EXAMINE THIS!
WAIT...THE FISSURE IN THE ICE!
THERE'S STEAM RISING FROM THE EXPOSED WATER!
BUT THE WATER COULDN'T POSSIBLY BE THAT MUCH WARMER THAN THE AIR AROUND IT, UNLESS...
YES! THERE ARE STRANGE COLORED LIGHTS, DEEP BELOW THE SURFACE!

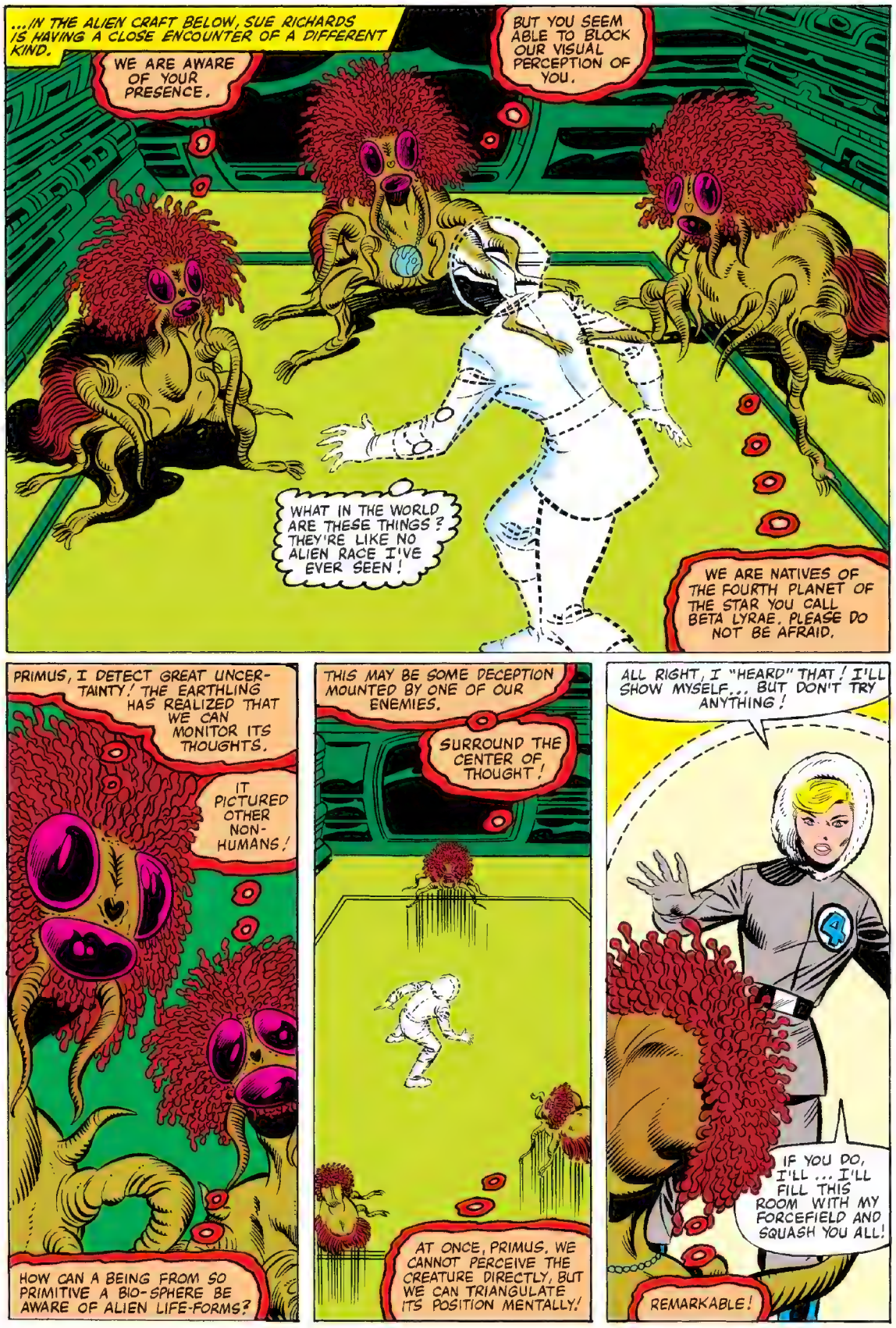
AND, AS SUSAN RICHARDS MAKES ONE DISCOVERY, THE REST OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR IS ABOUT TO MAKE ANOTHER... OF A VERY DIFFERENT SORT!
BEN, BE CAREFUL! WE DON'T KNOW WHAT THESE CREATURES ARE CAPABLE OF DOING!
HUH? HEY, YOU GOTTA BE KIDDIN' ME, REED!
BEIN' CAREFUL IS ONE THING, BUT THIS IS RIDICULOUS! YOU DON'T REALLY THINK THESE UNDERNOURISHED LI'L MUNCHKINS CAN HURT US, DO YOU?
I MEAN...
...HEY!
WHAM
HOLY COW! A BUNCH OF 'EM FUSED TOGETHER INTO ONE BIG ONE!
FIRST, WE GET BLACK-OUTS ALL OVER THE WORLD*... AND NOW WE GET THIS BIG GALOOT! IF SOMEONE SEZ "KLAATU BARADA NICTO," I'M LEAVIN'!
*LAST ISSUE --JIM.


AND AS THE MAMMOTH CREATURE ADVANCES ON THE THING...
I WAS AFRAID OF THIS... THEY'RE NOT TRUE LIFE FORMS! THEY'RE SOME KIND OF PLASTOID ROBOTS!
ROBOTS? IN THAT CASE, I DON'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT HURTING THEM!
LET'S SEE HOW THEY REACT WHEN I ROUND UP A BUNCH OF THEM!
OKAY, GUYS -- TRY FUSING INTO A THIRD-RATE HULK NOW... AND SEE WHERE IT GETS YOU!
ALMOST INSTANTLY, AS IF IN RESPONSE TO THE TORCH'S CHALLENGE...
HERE THEY COME -- JUST LIKE THE ONES THAT ATTACKED THE THING!
NO, WAIT! THEY'RE TAKING ON A DIFFERENT FORM THAN THE OTHERS!
AND, TO JOHNNY STORM'S SURPRISE, A GREAT MANTA-LIKE SHAPE TAKES FORM... LAUNCHING ITSELF OVER HIS FLAME-WALL!
REED! THEY'RE ADAPTING TO MATCH OUR POWERS! HOW CAN WE DEFEAT THEM?

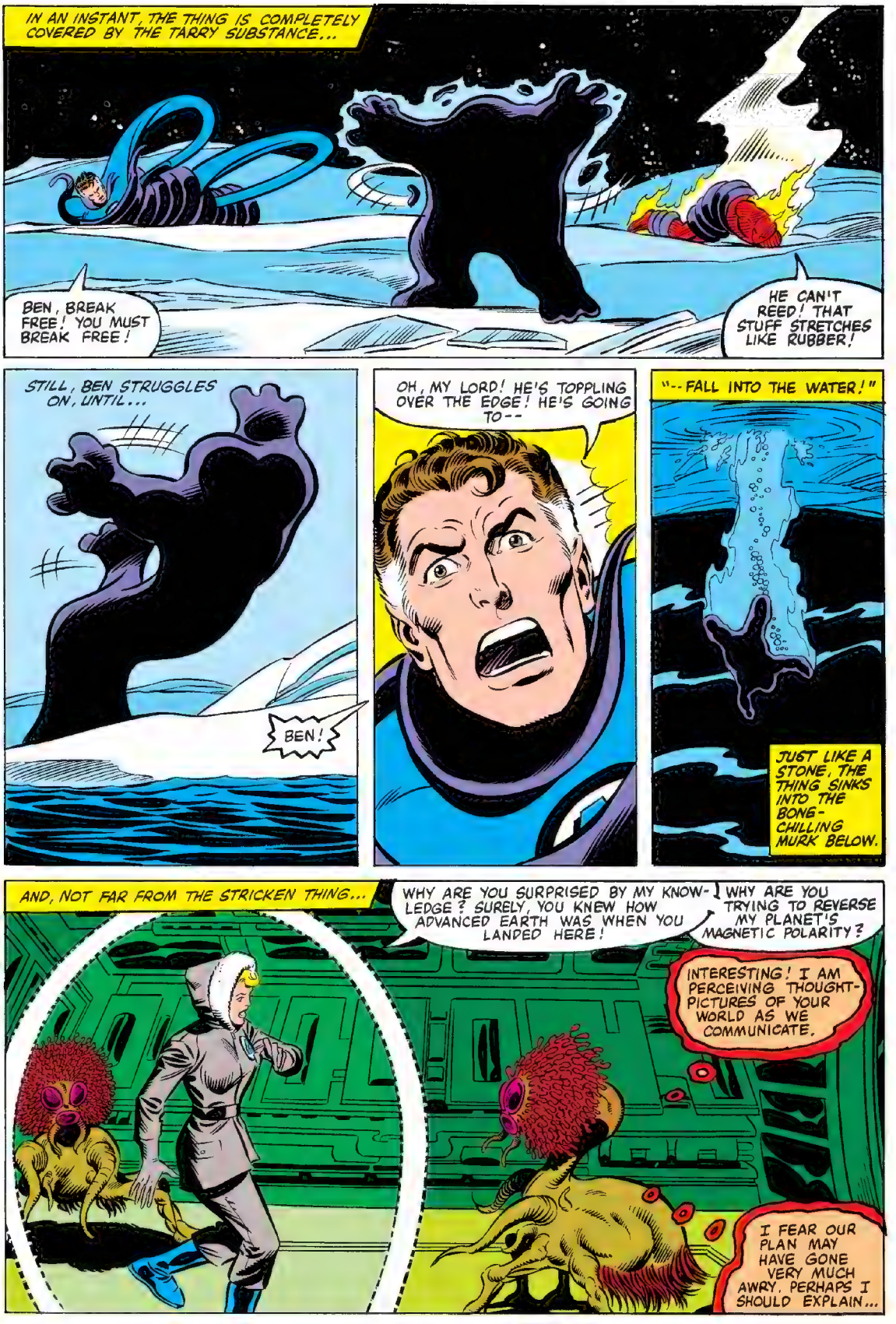

NOT FAR AWAY, THE TORCH'S SISTER ECHOES HIS FEARS...
THE BOYS ARE BARELY HOLDING THEIR OWN AGAINST THOSE ROBOT CREATURES!
IT'S UP TO ME TO DO WHAT I CAN TO HELP...
...AND THAT MEANS DISCOVERING JUST WHAT IS BEHIND THIS TOWER! IF I CAN HALT ITS PROCESSES, I BET I'LL FIND A WAY TO STOP THE ROBOTS, TOO!
THOSE LIGHTS BELOW THE WATER ARE MY ONLY CLUE...
...SO, DOWN I GO!
FORMING AN INVISIBLE FORCE-FIELD AROUND HER, LIKE A MAKESHIFT DIVING BELL, SUE DESCENDS INTO THE ICY WATER...
THE LIGHTS ARE COMING FROM SOME KIND OF SPACE-SHIP, BUT IT'S NOT LIKE ANY I'VE EVER SEEN!
I DON'T HAVE TOO MUCH AIR LEFT. IF I CAN JUST FIND AN AIR-LOCK OR... WAIT!
THAT STREAM OF BUBBLES RISING FROM THAT SECTION OF THE SHIP COULD BE WHAT I'M LOOKING FOR!
IN SECONDS...
INCREDIBLE--A FORCE-SCREEN AIRLOCK! THANK GOODNESS, I DIDN'T HAVE TO FIGURE OUT ANY ALIEN CONTROL SYSTEMS... AND THERE'S AN OXYGEN ATMOSPHERE IN HERE!
BUT WHAT DO I DO NOW? THE SHIP SEEMS QUIET-- BUT EVERY-THING LOOKS SHUT DOWN... AS IF IT'S WAITING FOR SOMETHING!


BUT WHAT?! WHAT PURPOSE COULD IT HAVE HERE? WHY ARE THOSE LITTLE ROBOTS DELIBERATELY REVERSING THE EARTH'S MAGNETIC POLARITY?
IS IT THE PRELUDE TO SOME KIND OF INVASION?
HMMM, THIS IS THE ONLY FULLY ACTIVE CHAMBER I'VE SEEN SO FAR. WHAT COULD IT BE FOR?
THOSE OPEN CASES LOOK LIKE SOME KIND OF HIBERNATION TANKS... BUT NOTHING EVEN REMOTELY HUMAN EVER USED THEM!
EXCELLENT, HUMAN! BUT I AM SURPRISED... WE DID NOT THINK YOUR RACE HAD EVOLVED ENOUGH TO RECOGNIZE A TECHNOLOGICAL ARTIFACT!
OH!
AND AS THE INVISIBLE GIRL WHIRLS ABOUT IN HORROR--
--ON THE SURFACE, THINGS ARE NOT GOING WELL FOR THE OTHERS.
IT'S NO GOOD! THIS CREATURE IS PUMMELLING BEN RELENTLESSLY, AND THERE'S NOTHING I CAN DO TO STOP IT!
REED-- LOOK OUT!
EH?
GOOD LORD! MORE OF THE ROBOTS ARE SHAPING THEMSELVES INTO AN ELASTIC TENTACLE!
JOHNNY WAS RIGHT! THEY'RE COUNTERING OUR POWERS WITH THE BEST EQUIVALENTS THEY CAN FORM!

IT'S SNARED REED... AND THIS FLYING FREAK IS GOING TO GET ME ANY SECOND!
I HAVE SPEED ON MY SIDE, BUT IT CAN CHANGE DIRECTION JUST BY--
--MUMPH... BY CHANGING SHAPE! IT'S ENGULFED ME IN ITS OWN BODY... AND IT'S FIREPROOF! I'LL FLAME-OUT FROM LACK OF AIR AND SUFFOCATE IN SECONDS, UNLESS--!
SUMMONING EVERY IOTA OF HIS AWESOME FLAME POWER, THE HUMAN TORCH LASHES OUT WITH THE FULL FURY OF AN EXPLODING SUN!
I DID IT! MY NOVA-BLAST BLEW THE THING TO PIECES -- I'M FREE!
AH, BUT FOR HOW LONG?
OH, NO! THE INDIVIDUAL PIECES ARE STILL ACTIVE! EVEN BLASTED TO SMITHEREENS, IT'S ATTACKING ME!
I'M TOO WEAK FOR ANOTHER NOVA-BLAST... AND THESE THINGS ARE TIGHTENING ON ME LIKE A VISE! I CAN'T..BREATHE!
AND, AS A DARK SHROUD OF UNCONSCIOUSNESS THREATENS TO OVERWHELM THE TORCH...

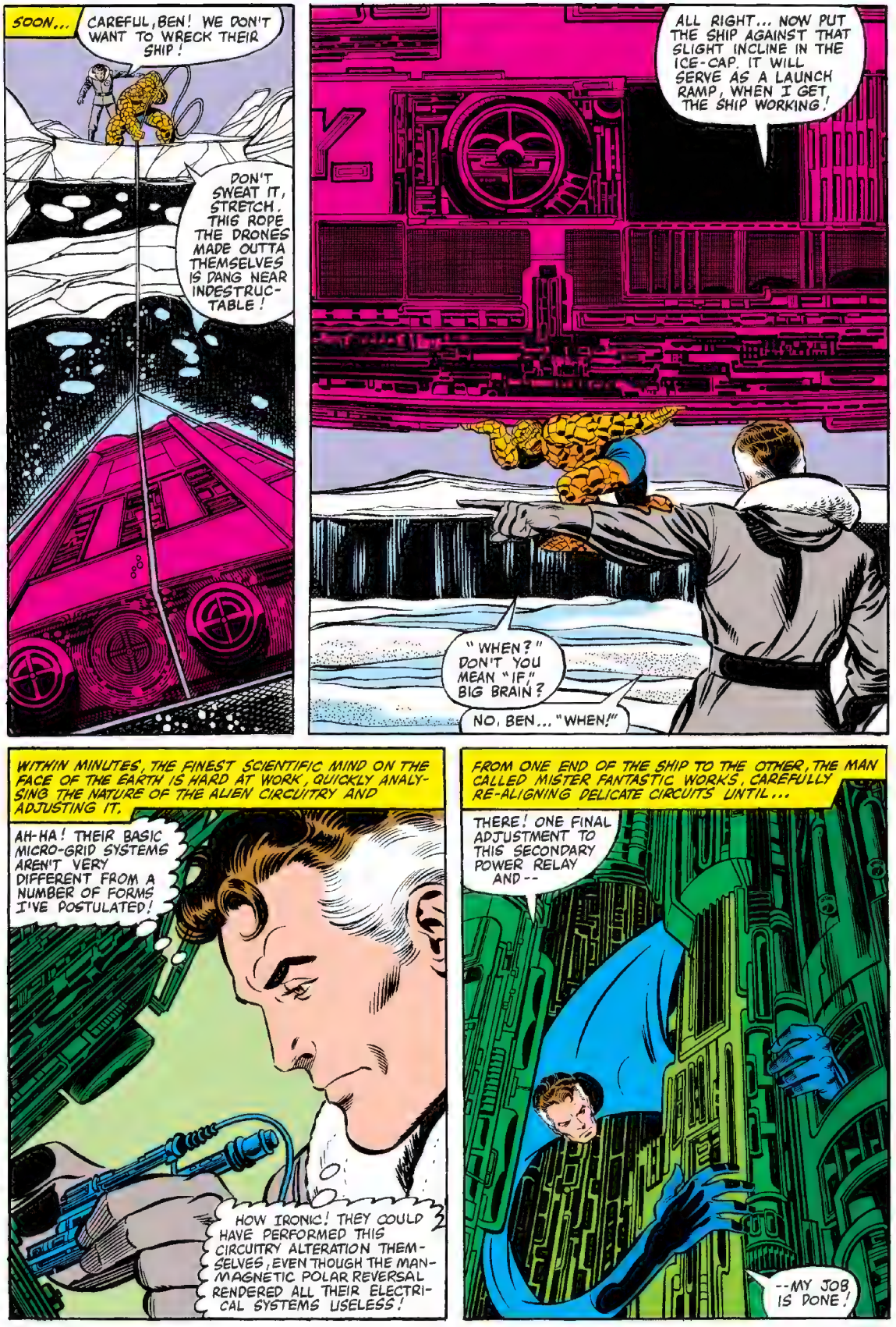

...IN THE ALIEN CRAFT BELOW, SUE RICHARDS IS HAVING A CLOSE ENCOUNTER OF A DIFFERENT KIND.
WE ARE AWARE OF YOUR PRESENCE.
BUT YOU SEEM ABLE TO BLOCK OUR VISUAL PERCEPTION OF YOU.
WHAT IN THE WORLD ARE THESE THINGS? THEY'RE LIKE NO ALIEN RACE I'VE EVER SEEN!
WE ARE NATIVES OF THE FOURTH PLANET OF THE STAR YOU CALL BETA LYRAE. PLEASE DO NOT BE AFRAID.
PRIMUS, I DETECT GREAT UNCERTAINTY! THE EARTHLING HAS REALIZED THAT WE CAN MONITOR ITS THOUGHTS.
IT PICTURED OTHER NON-HUMANS!
HOW CAN A BEING FROM SO PRIMITIVE A BIO-SPHERE BE AWARE OF ALIEN LIFE-FORMS?
THIS MAY BE SOME DECEPTION MOUNTED BY ONE OF OUR ENEMIES.
SURROUND THE CENTER OF THOUGHT!
AT ONCE, PRIMUS, WE CANNOT PERCEIVE THE CREATURE DIRECTLY, BUT WE CAN TRIANGULATE ITS POSITION MENTALLY!
ALL RIGHT, I "HEARD" THAT! I'LL SHOW MYSELF... BUT DON'T TRY ANYTHING!
IF YOU DO, I'LL ... I'LL FILL THIS ROOM WITH MY FORCEFIELD AND SQUASH YOU ALL!
REMARKABLE!

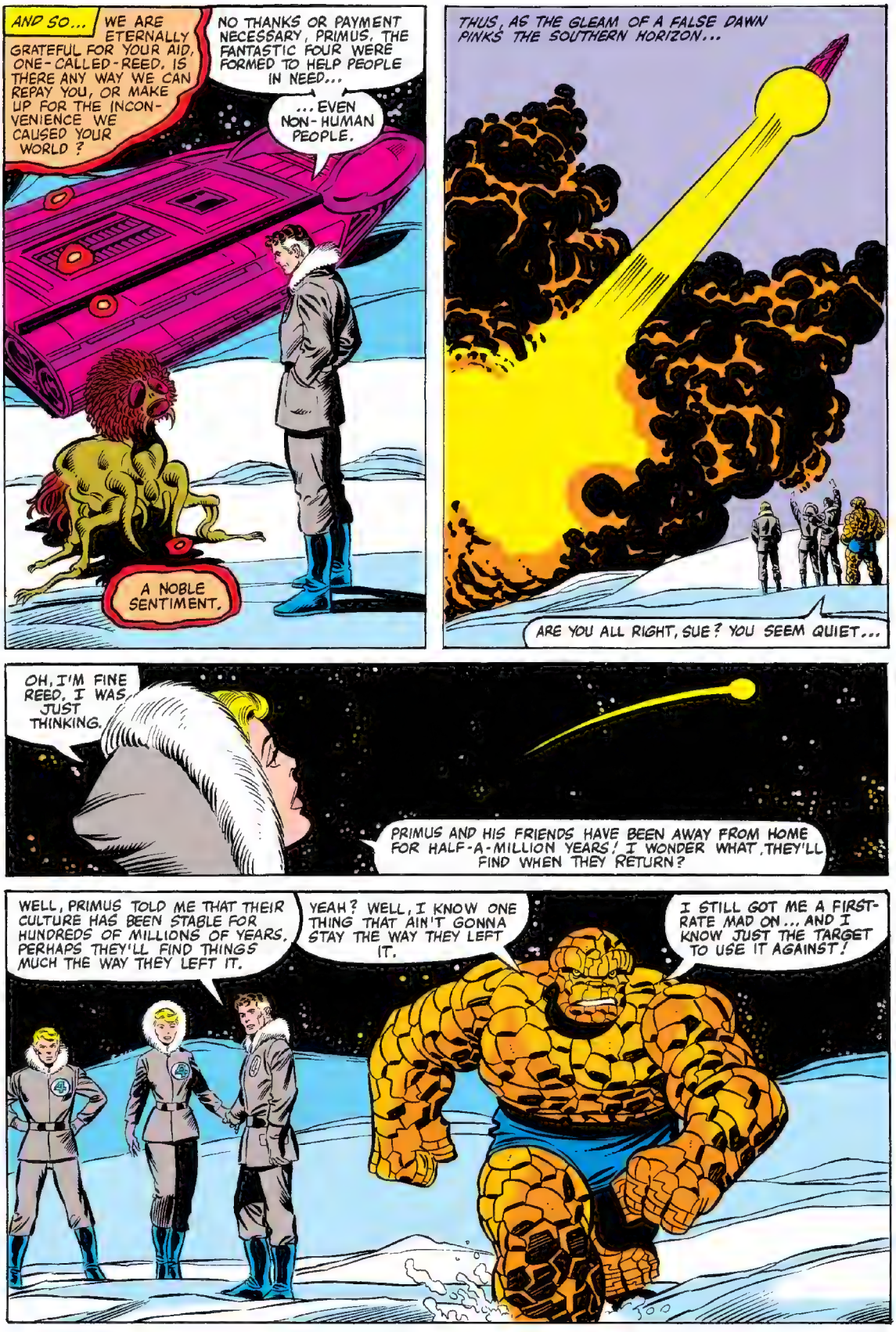
AND, ONCE AGAIN, ON THE SURFACE...
SPOW
OKAY, YA TWO-BIT GUMBY --I'VE HAD ENOUGH!
IT'S CLOBBERIN' TIME!
HOLY COW! I KNOCKED THE CRITTER TO PIECES!
GOT... TO FIGHT... GOT TO... STAY CONSCIOUS!
BEN... BE CAREFUL!
DON'T WORRY ABOUT ME, TORCHIE! SOON AS I MUSH THESE PIECES, I'LL BUST YOU OUTTA ... HEY!
WHAT'RE THEY DOIN'?
MY GOSH! THE PIECES ALL FUSED INTO TINY LITTLE CANNONS!
I CAN HANDLE IMPACTS FROM ALMOST ANY KINDA SHELL, BUT IF THEY'RE LASERS OR SOMETHING--!
THEY AREN'T, HOWEVER...
GO
OSH
HEY! IT'S SOME KINDA LIQUID GOOP!
IT'S ALL OVER ME... AN' IT'S HARDENING!


IN AN INSTANT, THE THING IS COMPLETELY COVERED BY THE TARRY SUBSTANCE...
BEN, BREAK FREE! YOU MUST BREAK FREE!
HE CAN'T REED! THAT STUFF STRETCHES LIKE RUBBER!
STILL, BEN STRUGGLES ON, UNTIL...
BEN!
OH, MY LORD! HE'S TOPPLING OVER THE EDGE! HE'S GOING TO--
"--FALL INTO THE WATER!"
JUST LIKE A STONE, THE THING SINKS INTO THE BONE-CHILLING MURK BELOW.
AND, NOT FAR FROM THE STRICKEN THING...
WHY ARE YOU SURPRISED BY MY KNOWLEDGE? SURELY, YOU KNEW HOW ADVANCED EARTH WAS WHEN YOU LANDED HERE!
WHY ARE YOU TRYING TO REVERSE MY PLANET'S MAGNETIC POLARITY?
INTERESTING! I AM PERCEIVING THOUGHT-PICTURES OF YOUR WORLD AS WE COMMUNICATE.
I FEAR OUR PLAN MAY HAVE GONE VERY MUCH AWRY. PERHAPS I SHOULD EXPLAIN...

...I AM CALLED PRIMUS. I AM THE FIRST-AMONG-EQUALS, LEADER OF AN EXPLORATORY COLONIZATION PARTY WHICH CAME TO YOUR WORLD LONG BEFORE YOUR RACE DEVELOPED ANY TECHNOLOGY.
"WE WERE HERE FOR SEVERAL THOUSAND SOLAR REVOLUTIONS--MY RACE HAVING A MUCH LONGER LIFESPAN THAN YOURS-- WHEN A PECULIAR DISPLAY OF AURORA OCCURRED.
"AT FIRST, WE WERE MYSTIFIED... THEN WE DISCOVERED THAT OUR MACHINES NO LONGER FUNCTIONED!
"TO OUR HORROR, WE REALIZED THAT THE MAGNETIC POLES OF YOUR PLANET HAD REVERSED--
"--AND THAT WE WOULD BE UNABLE TO LEAVE UNTIL THE POLARITY WAS RESTORED TO THAT OF OUR HOME-WORLD.
"SO, PROGRAMMING OUR NON-MECHANICAL PLASTOID DRONES TO FIND A WAY OF ACCOMPLISHING THIS, WE PUT OURSELVES INTO DEEP HYPNO-SLEEP TRANCE--TO AVOID BOREDOM."
"--AND WAITED.
"OUTSIDE, WE ASSUME, THE DRONES WORKED TOWARDS THEIR SET TASK."
YES, I REMEMBER REED TELLING ME ONCE ABOUT THE EARTH HAVING REVERSED POLARITY... BUT THAT HAPPENED 500,000 YEARS AGO!
WE HAVE A HUGE TECHNOLOGICAL CULTURE NOW--ALMOST AS ADVANCED AS YOUR OWN!
THEN THE IMAGES I HAVE PICKED UP FROM YOU ARE TRUE! WE HAVE BEEN ASLEEP HERE HALF-A-MILLION YEARS! YOUR SOCIETY HAS, OF COURSE, EVOLVED!
BY THE GRID! WE ARE IN DANGER OF COMMITTING A GREAT CRIME AGAINST YOUR RACE!

ELSEWHERE...
REED! I :GASP: CAN'T TAKE... MUCH MORE OF THIS!
HANG ON, JOHNNY! I JUST REALIZED... WE'VE BEEN GOING ABOUT THIS ALL WRONG! LISTEN...
...TO DEFEAT THEM, WE MUST...
BUT, BEFORE THE LEADER OF THE F.F. CAN OUTLINE HIS PLAN...
SUE! BEN!
SPLOOSH
BEN, ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
YEAH... JUST LEMME CATCH MY BREATH.
DRONES! CEASE ATTACK ON NATIVE LIFE-FORMS!
REED, THE ROBOTS ARE TURNING INTO JELLY!
OH, REED, THANK GOODNESS! I WAS SO WORRIED ABOUT YOU I COULD HARDLY THINK STRAIGHT!
SUE, MY DARLING, ARE YOU ALL RIGHT? WHEN YOU DIDN'T APPEAR FOR SO LONG, I'D FEARED THE WORST!
QUICKLY, SUSAN RICHARDS FILLS HER HUSBAND IN ON THE STORY THE ALIENS TOLD HER...
AND SO, THEY'VE ALREADY DEACTIVATED THE TOWER. THEY DON'T WANT TO HURT US... THEY JUST WANT TO GO HOME.
ISN'T THERE SOME WAY WE CAN HELP THEM?
HMMM... YES, I BELIEVE THERE IS!


SOON...
CAREFUL, BEN! WE DON'T WANT TO WRECK THEIR SHIP!
DON'T SWEAT IT, STRETCH. THIS ROPE THE DRONES MADE OUTTA THEMSELVES IS DANG NEAR INDESTRUC-TABLE!
ALL RIGHT... NOW PUT THE SHIP AGAINST THAT SLIGHT INCLINE IN THE ICE-CAP. IT WILL SERVE AS A LAUNCH RAMP, WHEN I GET THE SHIP WORKING!
"WHEN?" DON'T YOU MEAN "IF," BIG BRAIN?
NO, BEN... "WHEN!"
WITHIN MINUTES, THE FINEST SCIENTIFIC MIND ON THE FACE OF THE EARTH IS HARD AT WORK, QUICKLY ANALY-SING THE NATURE OF THE ALIEN CIRCUITRY AND ADJUSTING IT.
AH-HA! THEIR BASIC MICRO-GRID SYSTEMS AREN'T VERY DIFFERENT FROM A NUMBER OF FORMS I'VE POSTULATED!
HOW IRONIC! THEY COULD HAVE PERFORMED THIS CIRCUITRY ALTERATION THEM-SELVES, EVEN THOUGH THE MAN-MAGNETIC POLAR REVERSAL RENDERED ALL THEIR ELECTRI-CAL SYSTEMS USELESS!
FROM ONE END OF THE SHIP TO THE OTHER, THE MAN CALLED MISTER FANTASTIC WORKS, CAREFULLY RE-ALIGNING DELICATE CIRCUITS UNTIL...
THERE! ONE FINAL ADJUSTMENT TO THIS SECONDARY POWER RELAY AND--
--MY JOB IS DONE!


AND SO... WE ARE ETERNALLY GRATEFUL FOR YOUR AID, ONE-CALLED-REED, IS THERE ANY WAY WE CAN REPAY YOU, OR MAKE UP FOR THE INCONVENIENCE WE CAUSED YOUR WORLD?
NO THANKS OR PAYMENT NECESSARY, PRIMUS. THE FANTASTIC FOUR WERE FORMED TO HELP PEOPLE IN NEED...
...EVEN NON-HUMAN PEOPLE.
A NOBLE SENTIMENT.
THUS, AS THE GLEAM OF A FALSE DAWN PINKS THE SOUTHERN HORIZON...
ARE YOU ALL RIGHT, SUE? YOU SEEM QUIET...
OH, I'M FINE REED, I WAS JUST THINKING.
PRIMUS AND HIS FRIENDS HAVE BEEN AWAY FROM HOME FOR HALF-A-MILLION YEARS! I WONDER WHAT THEY'LL FIND WHEN THEY RETURN?
WELL, PRIMUS TOLD ME THAT THEIR CULTURE HAS BEEN STABLE FOR HUNDREDS OF MILLIONS OF YEARS. PERHAPS THEY'LL FIND THINGS MUCH THE WAY THEY LEFT IT.
YEAH? WELL, I KNOW ONE THING THAT AIN'T GONNA STAY THE WAY THEY LEFT IT.
I STILL GOT ME A FIRST-RATE MAD ON... AND I KNOW JUST THE TARGET TO USE IT AGAINST!

IF THIS BLAMED TOWER CAN DO THE STUFF YOU SAY IT CAN-- REVERSE THE POLES OF THE EARTH AN' ALL--I DON'T THINK WE SHOULD LEAVE IT LYING AROUND!
CAN YA IMAGINE WHAT DR. DOOM OR SOME CRUM-BUM LIKE THAT WOULD DO WITH THIS? SHEESH!
SO, LEMME SEE HOW MANY HITS IT TAKES TO KNOCK IT OVER!
BEN, NO!
BUT REED'S SHOUTED WARNING COMES TOO LATE!
CRACK!
HOLY--! THE BLASTED THING SHATTERED!
EITHER I HIT A FLAW IN THE CRYSTAL WITH A LUCKY PUNCH... OR I DON'T KNOW MY OWN STRENGTH!
BEN--HURRY! GET UNDER MY FORCE-FIELD BEFORE YOU'RE SLASHED TO RIBBONS!
NICE GOIN', SUZIE!
THAT WAS FOOLISH, BEN!
THAT ALIEN ARTIFACT COULD HAVE PROVIDED US WITH UNTOLD INFORMATION... I STILL DON'T KNOW HOW IT WORKED! NOW, IT'S DESTROYED... AND I NEVER EVEN GOT A CHANCE TO EXAMINE IT!
AW, GIMME A BREAK, REED! IF AN ALIEN STUBBED HIS TOE, YOU'D WANT TO SPEND TEN YEARS STUDYIN' IT.
WE DONE OUR GOOD DEED FOR THE DAY... LET'S GO HOME!
NEXT
THE POSSESSION OF FRANKLIN RICHARDS!

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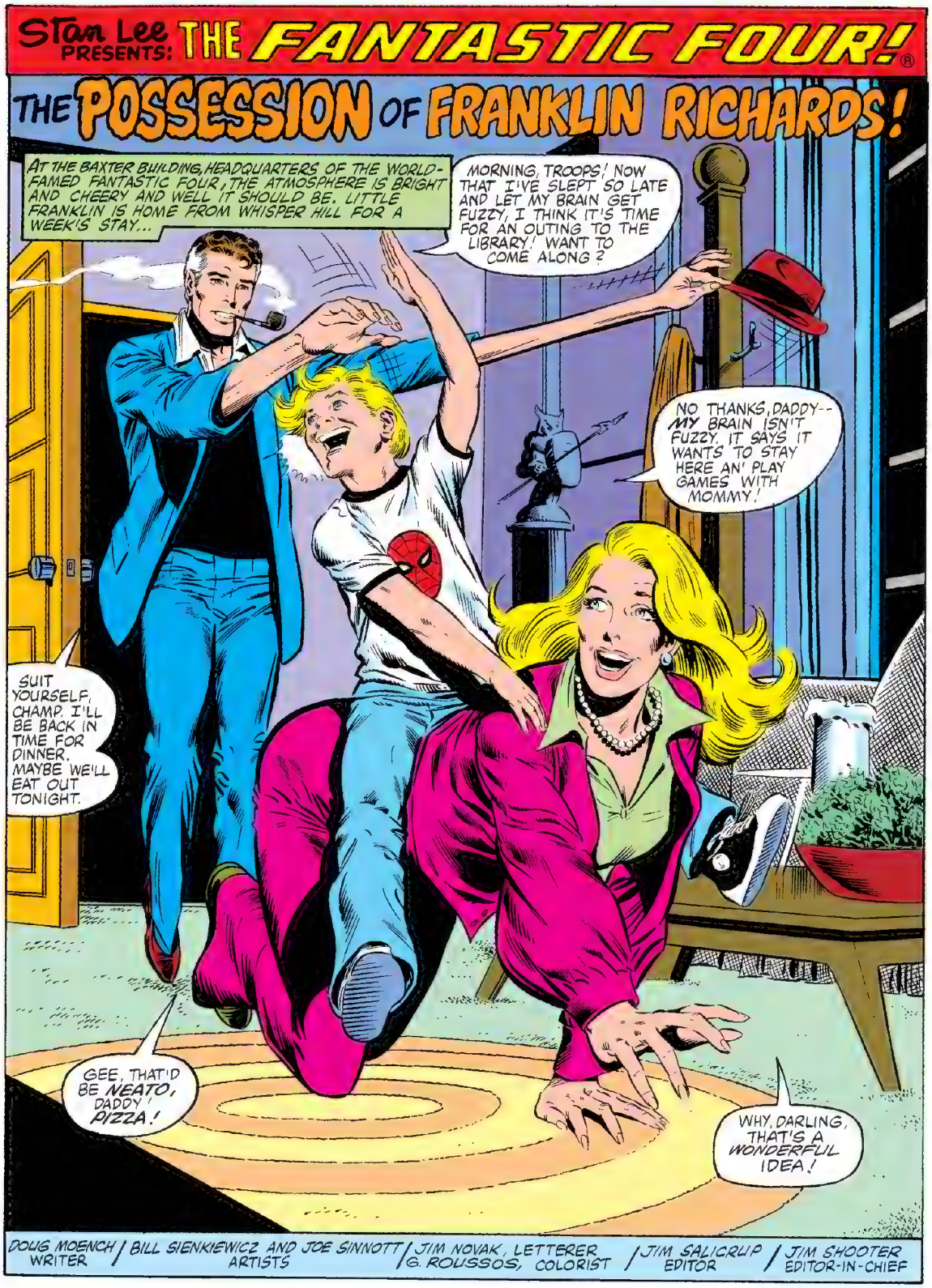
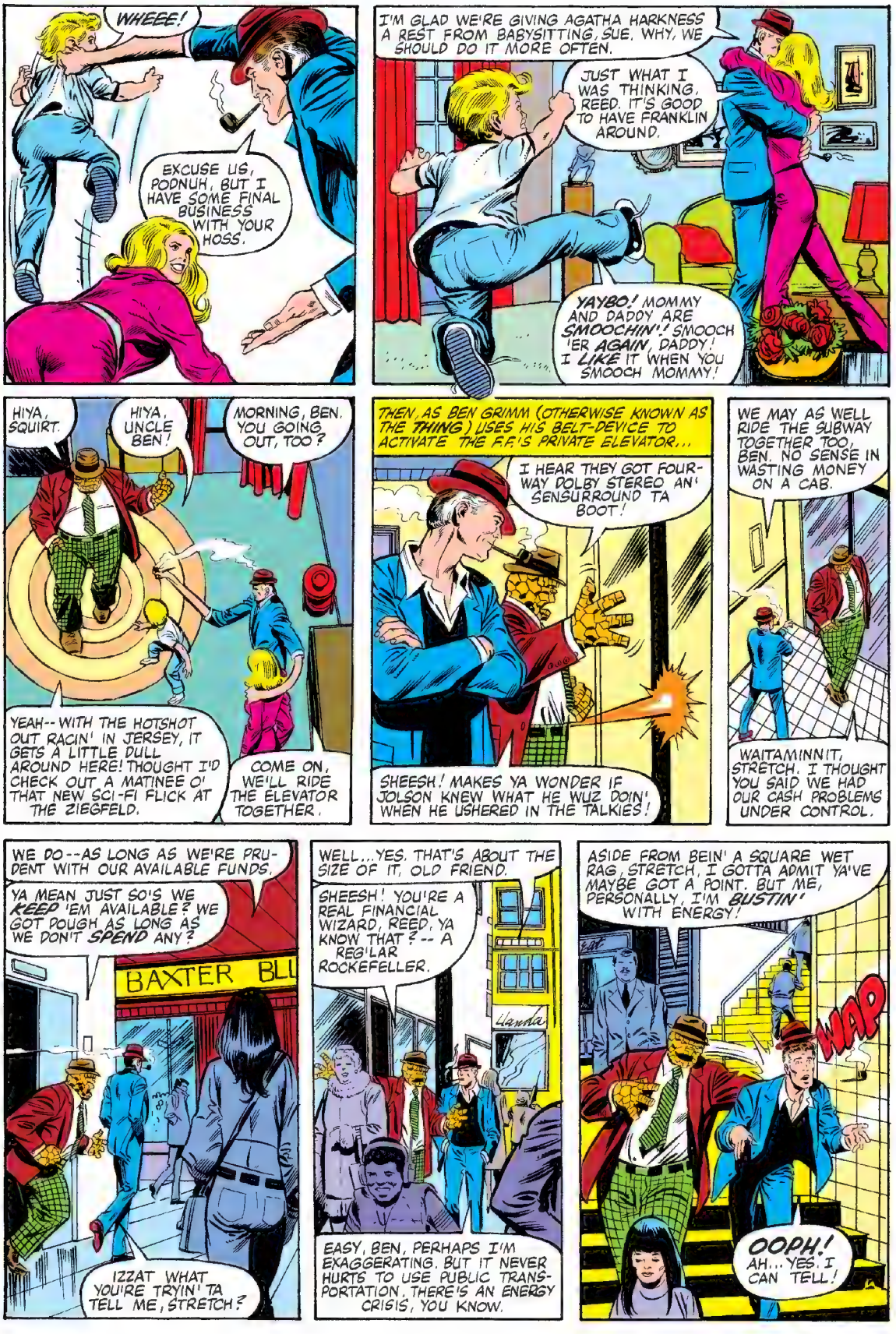
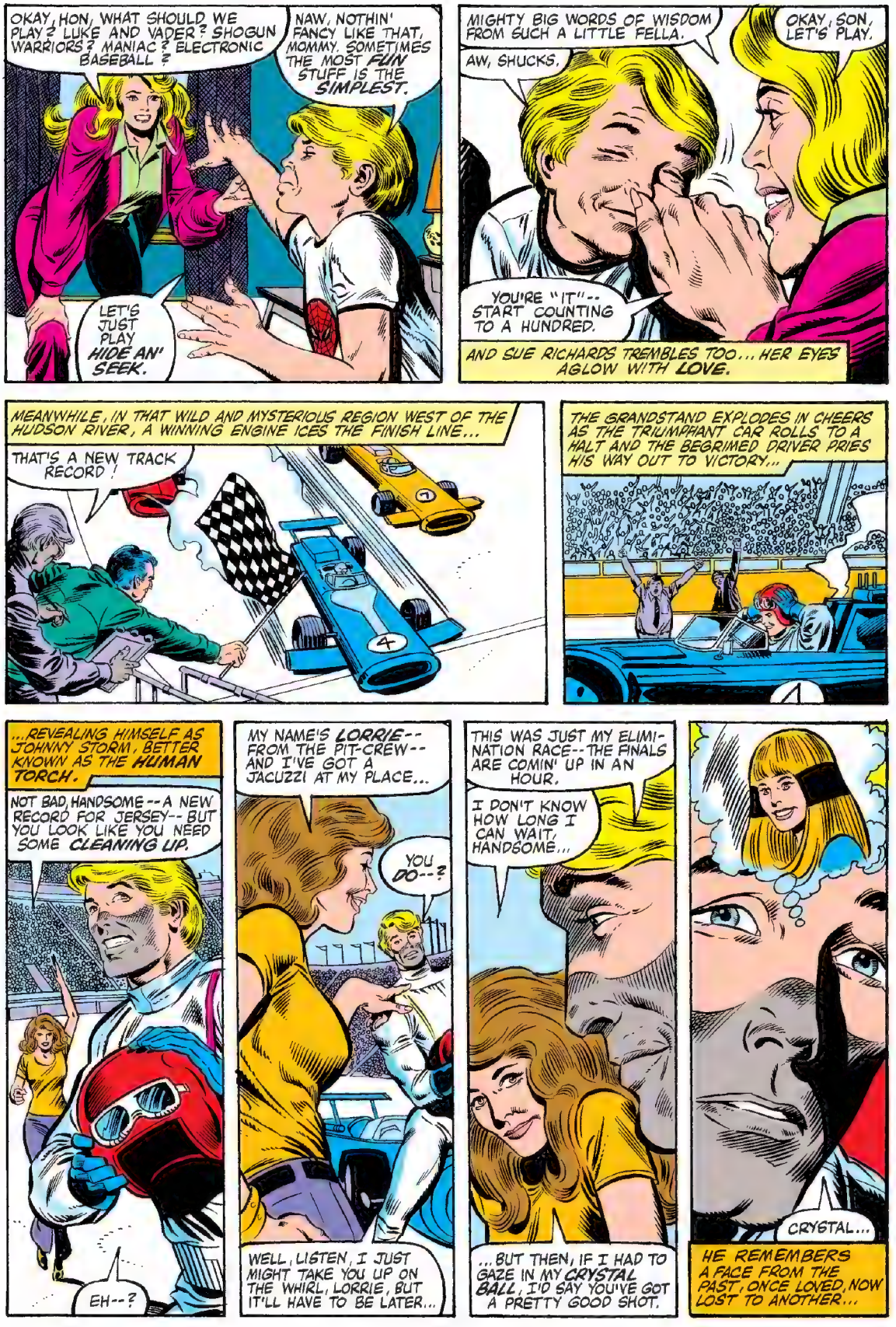
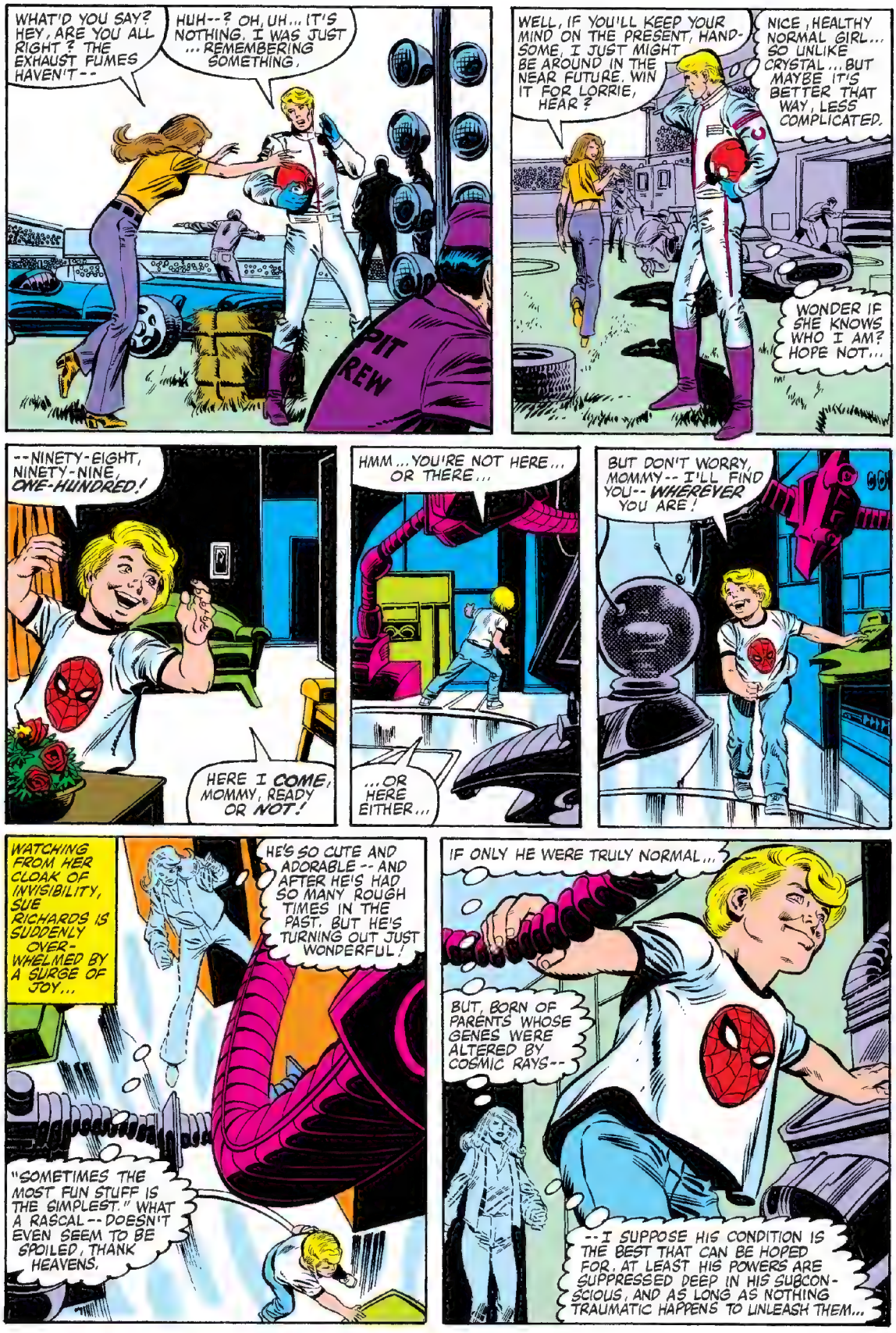
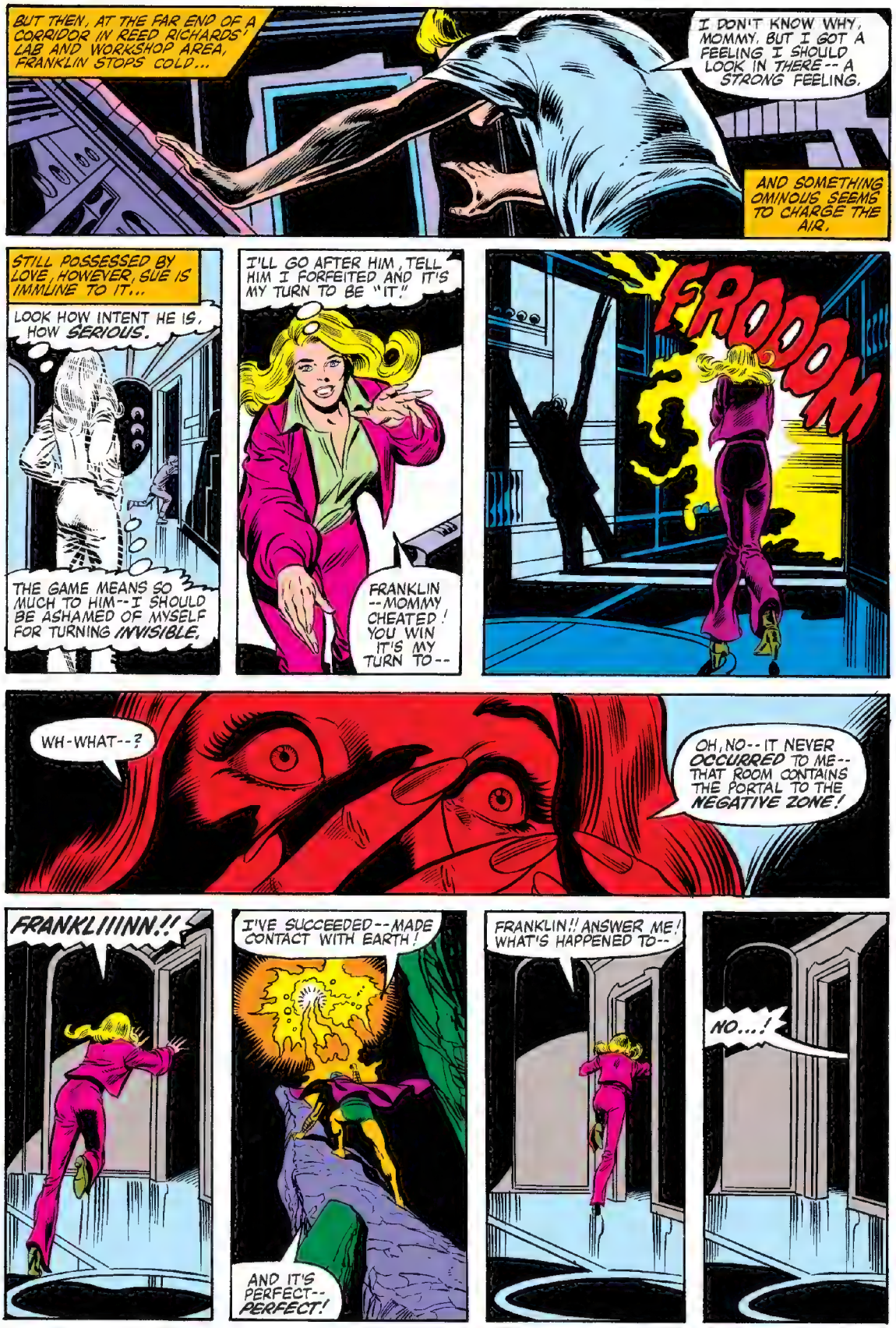

Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE FANTASTIC FOUR!®
THE POSSESSION OF FRANKLIN RICHARDS!
AT THE BAXTER BUILDING, HEADQUARTERS OF THE WORLD-FAMED FANTASTIC FOUR, THE ATMOSPHERE IS BRIGHT AND CHEERY AND WELL IT SHOULD BE. LITTLE FRANKLIN IS HOME FROM WHISPER HILL FOR A WEEK'S STAY...
MORNING, TROOPS! NOW THAT I'VE SLEPT SO LATE AND LET MY BRAIN GET FUZZY, I THINK IT'S TIME FOR AN OUTING TO THE LIBRARY! WANT TO COME ALONG?
NO THANKS, DADDY-- MY BRAIN ISN'T FUZZY, IT SAYS IT WANTS TO STAY HERE AN' PLAY GAMES WITH MOMMY!
SUIT YOURSELF, CHAMP. I'LL BE BACK IN TIME FOR DINNER. MAYBE WE'LL EAT OUT TONIGHT.
GEE, THAT'D BE NEATO, DADDY! PIZZA!
WHY, DARLING, THAT'S A WONDERFUL IDEA!
DOUG MOENCH / WRITER
BILL SIENKIEWICZ AND JOE SINNOTT / ARTISTS
JIM NOVAK, LETTERER / G. ROUSSOS, COLORIST
JIM SALICRUP / EDITOR
JIM SHOOTER / EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

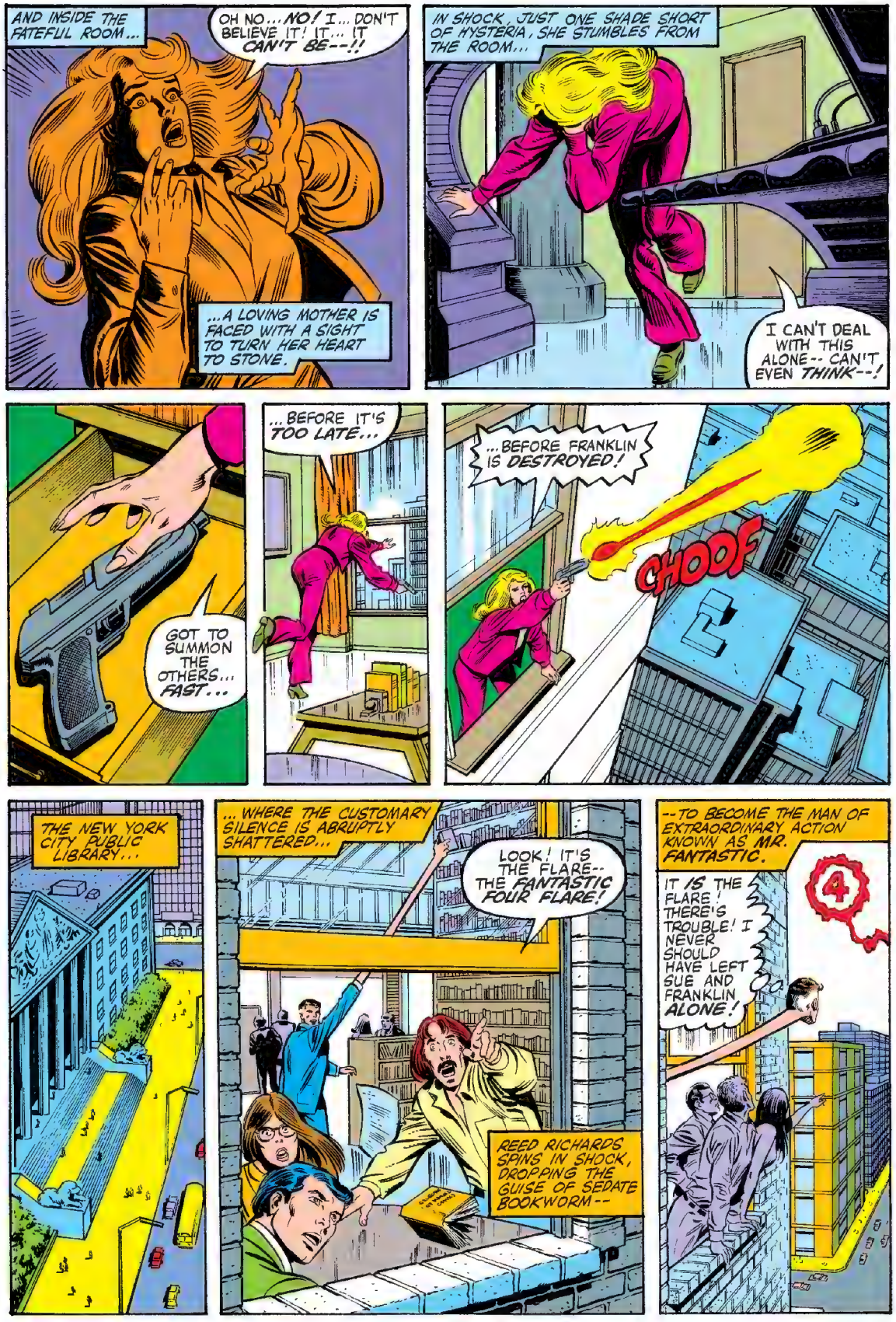

WHEEE!
EXCUSE US, PODNUH, BUT I HAVE SOME FINAL BUSINESS WITH YOUR HOSS.
I'M GLAD WE'RE GIVING AGATHA HARKNESS A REST FROM BABYSITTING, SUE. WHY, WE SHOULD DO IT MORE OFTEN.
JUST WHAT I WAS THINKING, REED. IT'S GOOD TO HAVE FRANKLIN AROUND.
YAYBO! MOMMY AND DADDY ARE SMOOCHIN'! SMOOCH 'ER AGAIN, DADDY! I LIKE IT WHEN YOU SMOOCH MOMMY!
HIYA, SQUIRT.
HIYA, UNCLE BEN!
MORNING, BEN. YOU GOING OUT, TOO?
YEAH--WITH THE HOTSHOT OUT RACIN' IN JERSEY, IT GETS A LITTLE DULL AROUND HERE! THOUGHT I'D CHECK OUT A MATINEE O' THAT NEW SCI-FI FLICK AT THE ZIEGFELD.
COME ON, WE'LL RIDE THE ELEVATOR TOGETHER.
THEN, AS BEN GRIMM (OTHERWISE KNOWN AS THE THING) USES HIS BELT-DEVICE TO ACTIVATE THE F.F.'S PRIVATE ELEVATOR...
I HEAR THEY GOT FOUR-WAY DOLBY STEREO AN' SENSURROUND TA BOOT!
SHEESH! MAKES YA WONDER IF JOLSON KNEW WHAT HE WUZ DOIN' WHEN HE USHERED IN THE TALKIES!
WE MAY AS WELL RIDE THE SUBWAY TOGETHER TOO, BEN. NO SENSE IN WASTING MONEY ON A CAB.
WAITAMINNIT, STRETCH. I THOUGHT YOU SAID WE HAD OUR CASH PROBLEMS UNDER CONTROL.
WE DO--AS LONG AS WE'RE PRUDENT WITH OUR AVAILABLE FUNDS.
YA MEAN JUST SO'S WE KEEP 'EM AVAILABLE? WE GOT DOUGH AS LONG AS WE DON'T SPEND ANY?
BAXTER BLI
IZZAT WHAT YOU'RE TRYIN' TA TELL ME, STRETCH?
WELL...YES. THAT'S ABOUT THE SIZE OF IT, OLD FRIEND.
SHEESH! YOU'RE A REAL FINANCIAL WIZARD, REED. YA KNOW THAT? -- A REG'LAR ROCKEFELLER.
EASY, BEN. PERHAPS I'M EXAGGERATING. BUT IT NEVER HURTS TO USE PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION. THERE'S AN ENERGY CRISIS, YOU KNOW.
ASIDE FROM BEIN' A SQUARE WET RAG, STRETCH, I GOTTA ADMIT YA'VE MAYBE GOT A POINT. BUT ME, PERSONALLY, I'M BUSTIN' WITH ENERGY!
WAP
OOPH!
AH...YES. I CAN TELL!

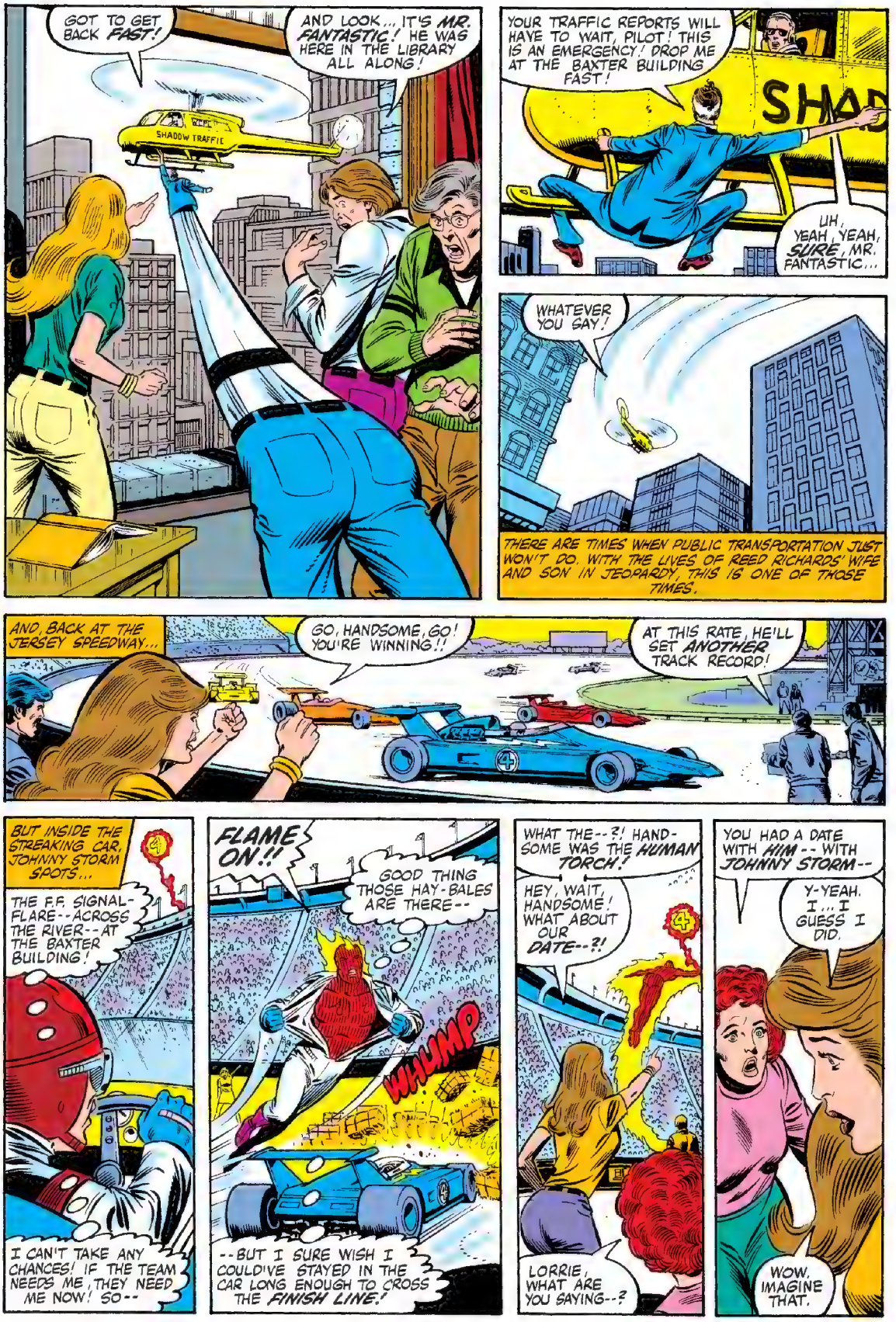
ELSEWHERE, IN A MISTY, BROODING PLACE OF SHIVERING DESOLATION--A PLACE KNOWN ONLY AS THE DARK REALM--THE WARLOCK NICHOLAS SCRATCH CLIMBS A CRAGGY SPIRE WHICH LEADS, SEEMINGLY, TO NOWHERE... AND NOTHING.
TIME HAS NO MEANING IN THIS BLEAK PLACE--IMPOSSIBLE TO TELL IF I'VE SPENT MERE DAYS OR ENDLESS AGES SEARCHING FOR A MEANS OF ESCAPE... AND UNTIL NOW, IN VAIN.
BY CONSIGNING ME HERE TO THE DARK REALM, AGATHA HARKNESS HAS PROVEN HERSELF A TRULY POWERFUL WITCH. ALL BECAUSE I SOUGHT TO CLAIM EARTH AND PUT IT UNDER THE RULE OF THE ELDRITCH FOLK, OUR FELLOW WITCHES--
"--AGATHA HARKNESS--MY OWN MOTHER!--BANISHED ME FROM OUR HAVEN OF NEW SALEM, FROM ALL OF EARTH ITSELF--WITH NO KNOWN WAY OF GETTING BACK!"
BUT NOW, AFTER SO LONG, MY POWERS DETECT SOME KIND OF ENERGY FLUX AT THE PEAK OF THIS MOUNTAIN--SOME KIND OF COSMIC DISTURBANCE...
...A GATEWAY TO ANOTHER REALM, PERHAPS ANOTHER DIMENSION... A LOCUS OF AWESOME POWER...
...AND, I SENSE, A LOCUS SOMEHOW LINKED, HOWEVER TENUOUSLY, WITH EARTH.
IF I CAN OPEN THE GATEWAY--PIERCE IT WITH A MENTAL PROBE--I MAY BE ABLE TO BETTER DISCERN THE CONNECTION...
AND HERE, ATOP THE CRAGGY PEAK, A FLOOD OF PSYCHIC ENERGY LASHES FROM THE WARLOCK'S MIND...
IT SNAKES OUTWARD, TEASING AND TICKLING AT A RIFT IN THE DARKLING FABRIC OF DEAD AIR. THE OPENING SLOWLY STRETCHES WIDER AND WIDER STILL, UNTIL--
I'VE DONE IT! MY MENTAL PROBE HAS OPENED THE GATEWAY!
AND YES! I FEEL A LINK WITH EARTH! I MUST FOLLOW IT, QUEST THROUGH THIS STRANGE OTHER DIMENSION UNTIL I FIND THE BRIDGE TO EARTH--!
MORE THAN THAT--THE BRIDGE TO MY ENEMIES THEMSELVES!
NICHOLAS SCRATCH GLOATS, AND FAIRLY TREMBLES WITH THE ANTICIPATION OF... VENGEANCE.

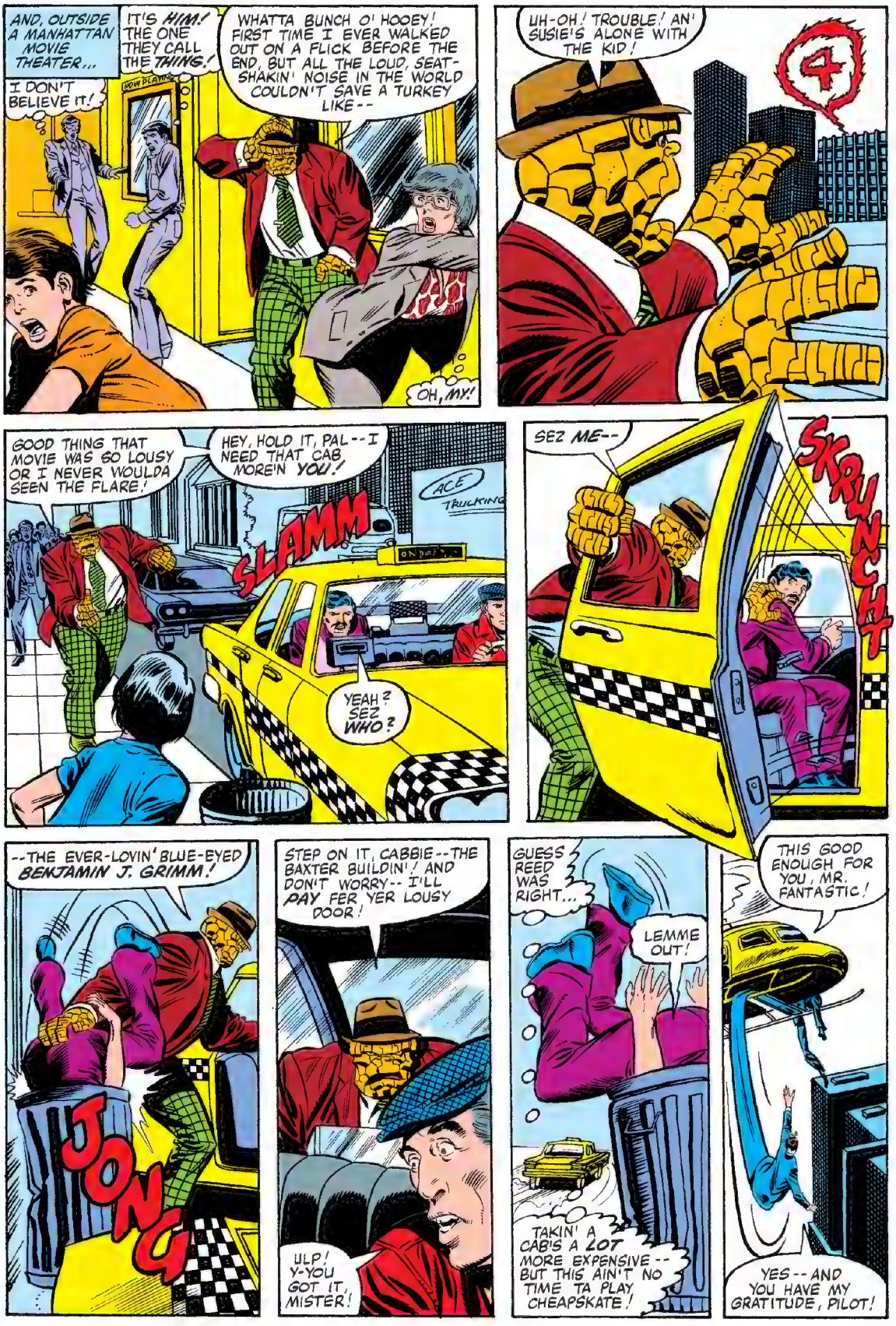

OKAY, HON, WHAT SHOULD WE PLAY? LUKE AND VADER? SHOGUN WARRIORS? MANIAC? ELECTRONIC BASEBALL?
NAW, NOTHIN' FANCY LIKE THAT, MOMMY. SOMETIMES THE MOST FUN STUFF IS THE SIMPLEST.
LET'S JUST PLAY HIDE AN' SEEK.
MIGHTY BIG WORDS OF WISDOM FROM SUCH A LITTLE FELLA.
OKAY, SON, LET'S PLAY.
AW, SHUCKS.
YOU'RE "IT"-- START COUNTING TO A HUNDRED.
AND SUE RICHARDS TREMBLES TOO... HER EYES AGLOW WITH LOVE.
MEANWHILE, IN THAT WILD AND MYSTERIOUS REGION WEST OF THE HUDSON RIVER, A WINNING ENGINE ICES THE FINISH LINE...
THAT'S A NEW TRACK RECORD!
THE GRANDSTAND EXPLODES IN CHEERS AS THE TRIUMPHANT CAR ROLLS TO A HALT AND THE BEGRIMED DRIVER PRIES HIS WAY OUT TO VICTORY...
...REVEALING HIMSELF AS JOHNNY STORM, BETTER KNOWN AS THE HUMAN TORCH.
NOT BAD, HANDSOME--A NEW RECORD FOR JERSEY-- BUT YOU LOOK LIKE YOU NEED SOME CLEANING UP.
EH--?
MY NAME'S LORRIE-- FROM THE PIT-CREW-- AND I'VE GOT A JACUZZI AT MY PLACE...
YOU DO--?
WELL, LISTEN, I JUST MIGHT TAKE YOU UP ON THE WHIRL, LORRIE, BUT IT'LL HAVE TO BE LATER...
THIS WAS JUST MY ELIMINATION RACE--THE FINALS ARE COMIN' UP IN AN HOUR.
I DON'T KNOW HOW LONG I CAN WAIT, HANDSOME...
...BUT THEN, IF I HAD TO GAZE IN MY CRYSTAL BALL, I'D SAY YOU'VE GOT A PRETTY GOOD SHOT.
CRYSTAL...
HE REMEMBERS A FACE FROM THE PAST, ONCE LOVED, NOW LOST TO ANOTHER...

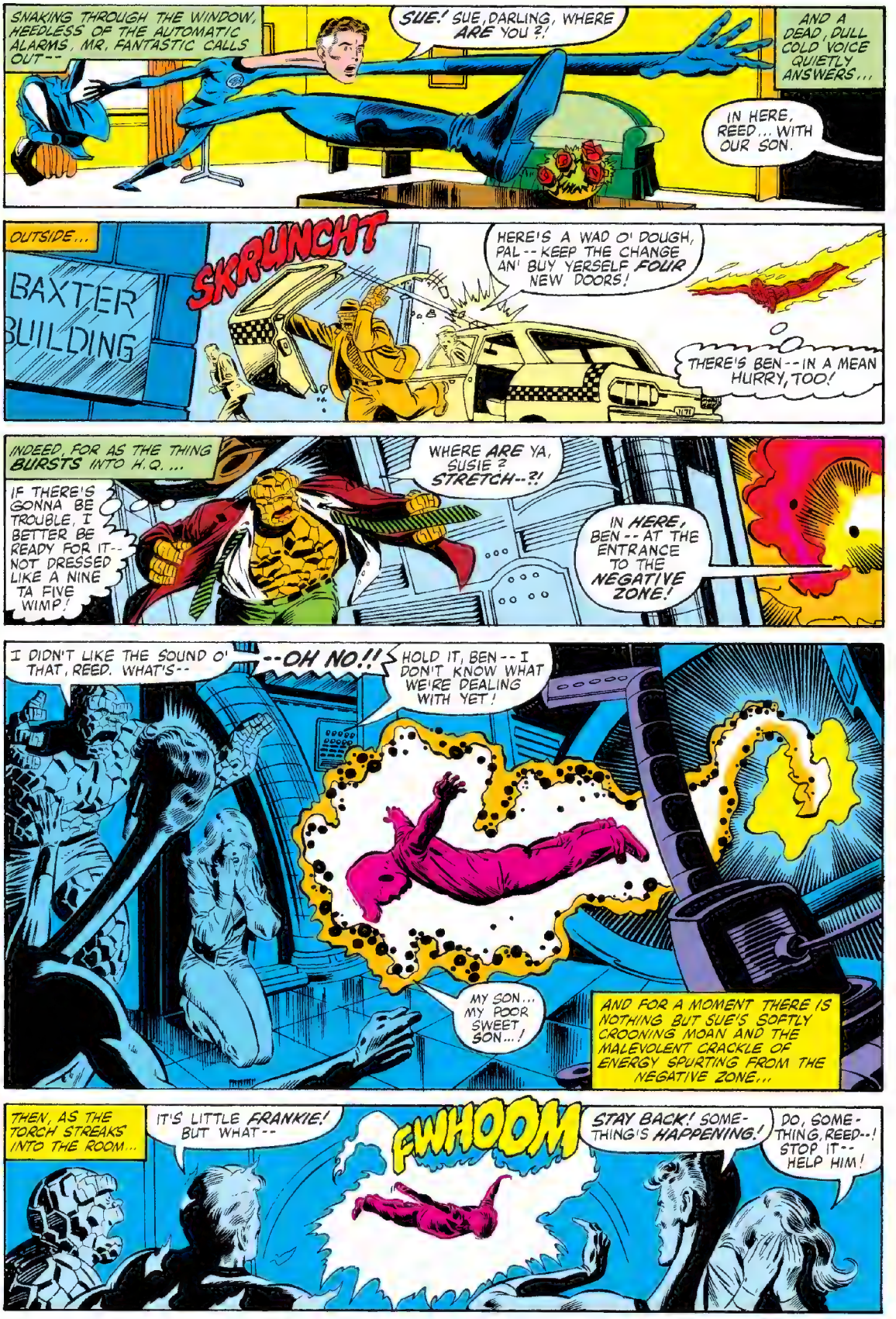

WHAT'D YOU SAY? HEY, ARE YOU ALL RIGHT? THE EXHAUST FUMES HAVEN'T--
HUH--? OH, UH... IT'S NOTHING. I WAS JUST ...REMEMBERING SOMETHING.
PIT CREW
WELL, IF YOU'LL KEEP YOUR MIND ON THE PRESENT, HANDSOME, I JUST MIGHT BE AROUND IN THE NEAR FUTURE. WIN IT FOR LORRIE, HEAR?
NICE, HEALTHY NORMAL GIRL... SO UNLIKE CRYSTAL... BUT MAYBE IT'S BETTER THAT WAY, LESS COMPLICATED.
WONDER IF SHE KNOWS WHO I AM? HOPE NOT...
--NINETY-EIGHT, NINETY-NINE, ONE-HUNDRED!
HERE I COME, MOMMY, READY OR NOT!
HMM... YOU'RE NOT HERE... OR THERE...
...OR HERE EITHER...
BUT DON'T WORRY, MOMMY-- I'LL FIND YOU-- WHEREVER YOU ARE!
WATCHING FROM HER CLOAK OF INVISIBILITY, SUE RICHARDS IS SUDDENLY OVERWHELMED BY A SURGE OF JOY...
HE'S SO CUTE AND ADORABLE -- AND AFTER HE'S HAD SO MANY ROUGH TIMES IN THE PAST. BUT HE'S TURNING OUT JUST WONDERFUL!
"SOMETIMES THE MOST FUN STUFF IS THE SIMPLEST." WHAT A RASCAL -- DOESN'T EVEN SEEM TO BE SPOILED, THANK HEAVENS.
IF ONLY HE WERE TRULY NORMAL...
BUT, BORN OF PARENTS WHOSE GENES WERE ALTERED BY COSMIC RAYS--
--I SUPPOSE HIS CONDITION IS THE BEST THAT CAN BE HOPED FOR. AT LEAST HIS POWERS ARE SUPPRESSED DEEP IN HIS SUBCONSCIOUS, AND AS LONG AS NOTHING TRAUMATIC HAPPENS TO UNLEASH THEM...


BUT THEN, AT THE FAR END OF A CORRIDOR IN REED RICHARDS' LAB AND WORKSHOP AREA, FRANKLIN STOPS COLD...
I DON'T KNOW WHY, MOMMY, BUT I GOT A FEELING I SHOULD LOOK IN THERE -- A STRONG FEELING.
AND SOMETHING OMINOUS SEEMS TO CHARGE THE AIR.
STILL POSSESSED BY LOVE, HOWEVER, SUE IS IMMUNE TO IT...
LOOK HOW INTENT HE IS, HOW SERIOUS.
THE GAME MEANS SO MUCH TO HIM -- I SHOULD BE ASHAMED OF MYSELF FOR TURNING INVISIBLE.
I'LL GO AFTER HIM, TELL HIM I FORFEITED AND IT'S MY TURN TO BE "IT."
FRANKLIN -- MOMMY CHEATED! YOU WIN IT'S MY TURN TO --
FROOOOM
WH-WHAT--?
OH, NO -- IT NEVER OCCURRED TO ME -- THAT ROOM CONTAINS THE PORTAL TO THE NEGATIVE ZONE!
FRANKLIIINN!!
I'VE SUCCEEDED -- MADE CONTACT WITH EARTH!
AND IT'S PERFECT -- PERFECT!
FRANKLIN!! ANSWER ME! WHAT'S HAPPENED TO --
NO...!

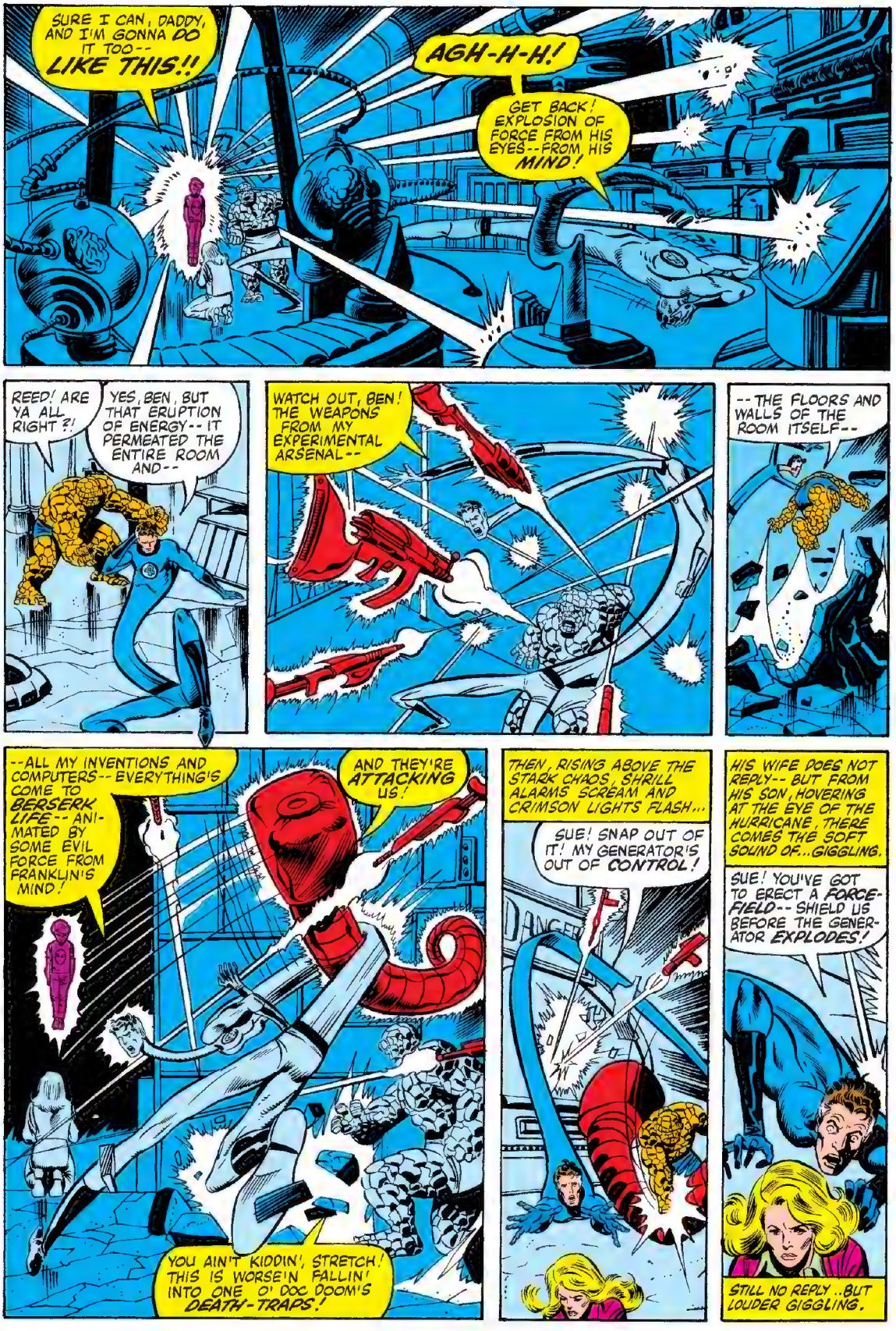

AND INSIDE THE FATEFUL ROOM...
OH NO...NO! I... DON'T BELIEVE IT! IT... IT CAN'T BE--!!
...A LOVING MOTHER IS FACED WITH A SIGHT TO TURN HER HEART TO STONE.
IN SHOCK, JUST ONE SHADE SHORT OF HYSTERIA, SHE STUMBLES FROM THE ROOM...
I CAN'T DEAL WITH THIS ALONE-- CAN'T EVEN THINK--!
GOT TO SUMMON THE OTHERS... FAST...
...BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE...
...BEFORE FRANKLIN IS DESTROYED!
CHOOF
THE NEW YORK CITY PUBLIC LIBRARY...
...WHERE THE CUSTOMARY SILENCE IS ABRUPTLY SHATTERED...
LOOK! IT'S THE FLARE-- THE FANTASTIC FOUR FLARE!
REED RICHARDS SPINS IN SHOCK, DROPPING THE GUISE OF SEDATE BOOKWORM--
--TO BECOME THE MAN OF EXTRAORDINARY ACTION KNOWN AS MR. FANTASTIC.
IT IS THE FLARE! THERE'S TROUBLE! I NEVER SHOULD HAVE LEFT SUE AND FRANKLIN ALONE!
4

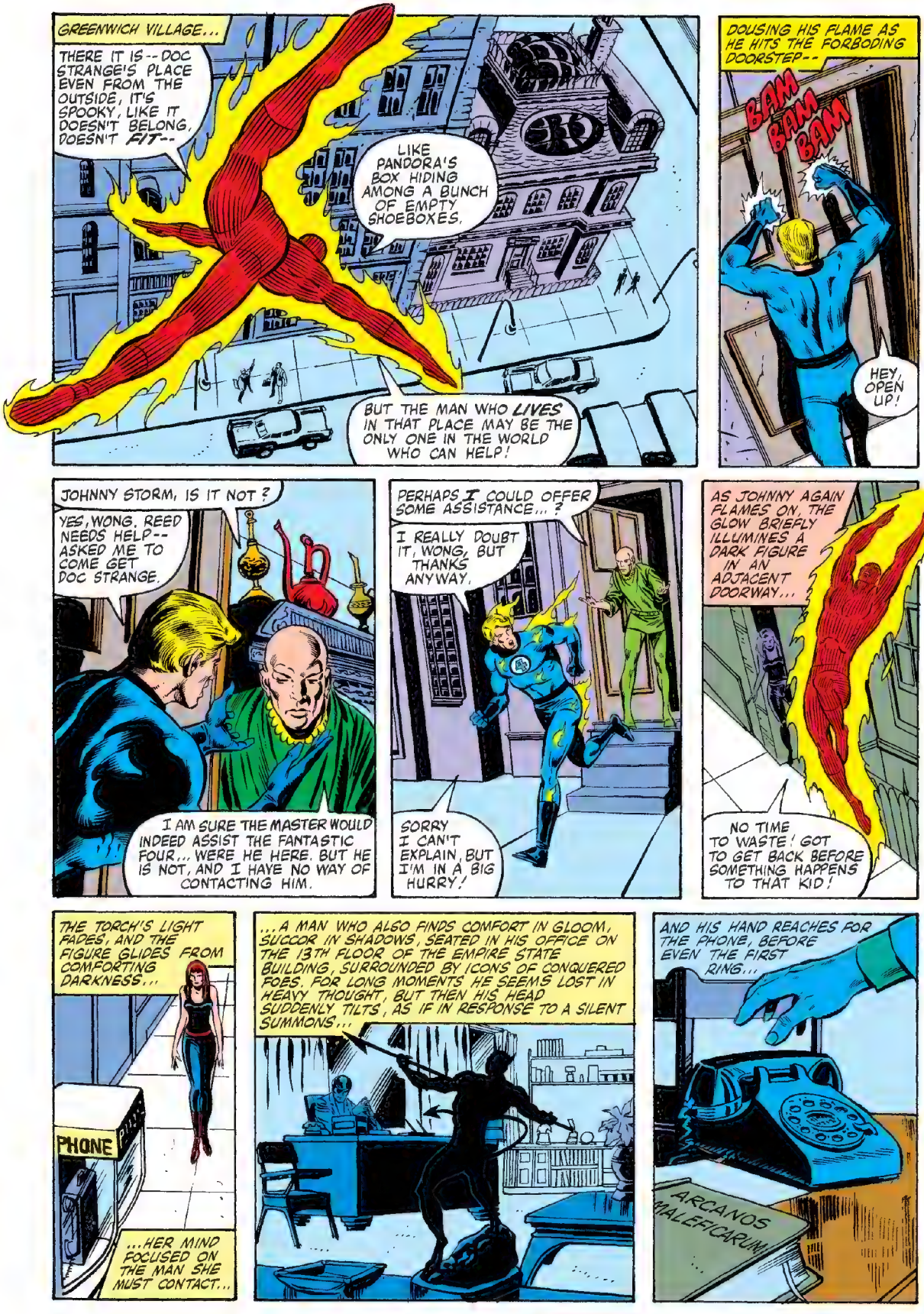

GOT TO GET BACK FAST!
AND LOOK... IT'S MR. FANTASTIC! HE WAS HERE IN THE LIBRARY ALL ALONG!
SHADOW TRAFFIC
YOUR TRAFFIC REPORTS WILL HAVE TO WAIT, PILOT! THIS IS AN EMERGENCY! DROP ME AT THE BAXTER BUILDING FAST!
UH, YEAH, YEAH, SURE, MR. FANTASTIC...
WHATEVER YOU SAY!
THERE ARE TIMES WHEN PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION JUST WON'T DO. WITH THE LIVES OF REED RICHARDS' WIFE AND SON IN JEOPARDY, THIS IS ONE OF THOSE TIMES.
AND, BACK AT THE JERSEY SPEEDWAY...
GO, HANDSOME, GO! YOU'RE WINNING!!
AT THIS RATE, HE'LL SET ANOTHER TRACK RECORD!
BUT INSIDE THE STREAKING CAR, JOHNNY STORM SPOTS...
THE F.F. SIGNAL-FLARE--ACROSS THE RIVER--AT THE BAXTER BUILDING!
I CAN'T TAKE ANY CHANCES! IF THE TEAM NEEDS ME, THEY NEED ME NOW! SO--
FLAME ON!!
GOOD THING THOSE HAY-BALES ARE THERE--
WHUMP
--BUT I SURE WISH I COULD'VE STAYED IN THE CAR LONG ENOUGH TO CROSS THE FINISH LINE!
WHAT THE--?! HANDSOME WAS THE HUMAN TORCH!
HEY, WAIT, HANDSOME! WHAT ABOUT OUR DATE--?!
LORRIE, WHAT ARE YOU SAYING--?
YOU HAD A DATE WITH HIM -- WITH JOHNNY STORM --
Y-YEAH. I... I GUESS I DID.
WOW. IMAGINE THAT.

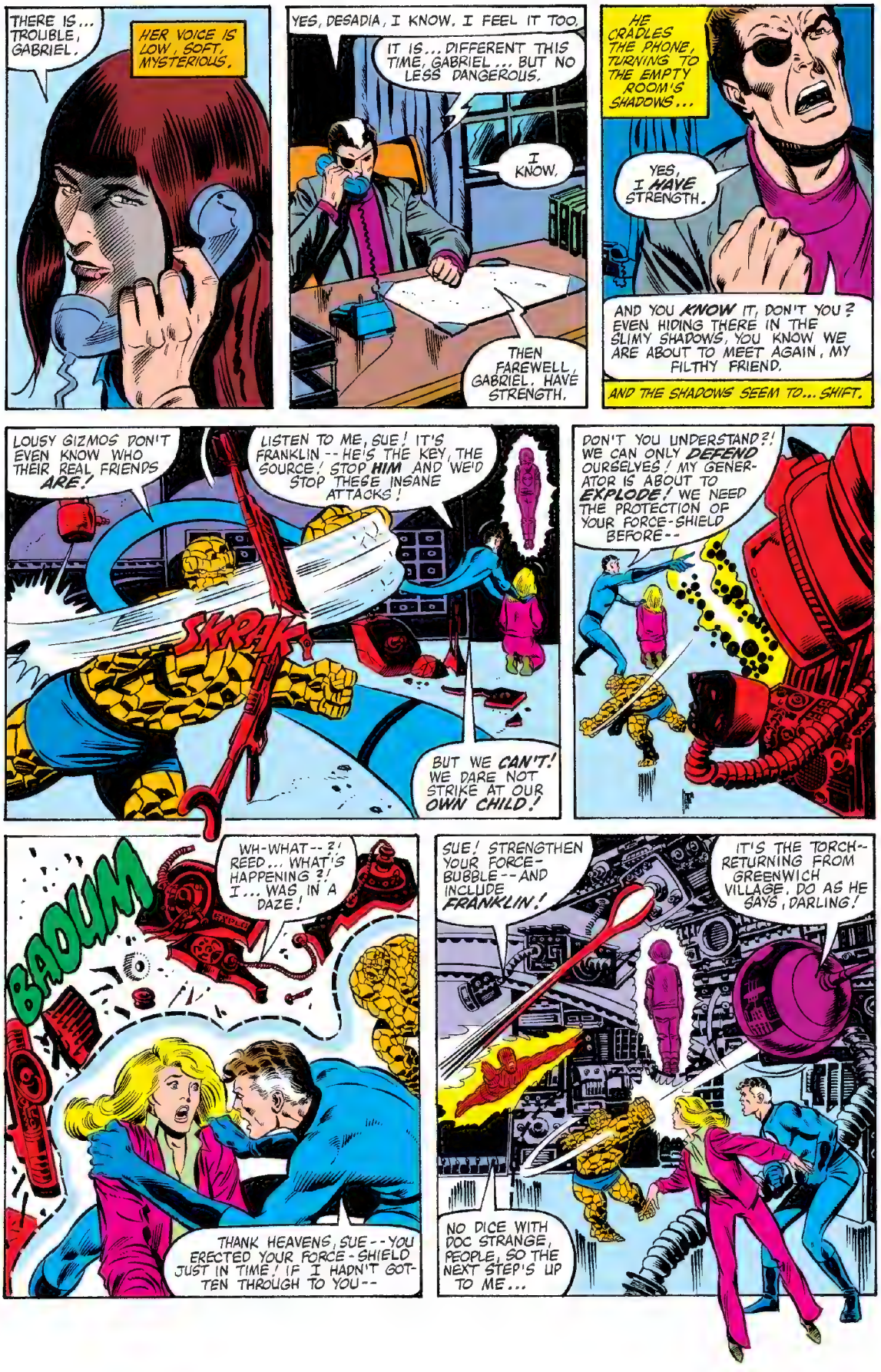

AND, OUTSIDE A MANHATTAN MOVIE THEATER...
I DON'T BELIEVE IT!
NOW PLAYING
IT'S HIM! THE ONE THEY CALL THE THING!
WHATTA BUNCH O' HOOEY! FIRST TIME I EVER WALKED OUT ON A FLICK BEFORE THE END, BUT ALL THE LOUD, SEAT-SHAKIN' NOISE IN THE WORLD COULDN'T SAVE A TURKEY LIKE--
OH, MY!
UH-OH! TROUBLE! AN' SUSIE'S ALONE WITH THE KID!
4
GOOD THING THAT MOVIE WAS SO LOUSY OR I NEVER WOULDA SEEN THE FLARE!
HEY, HOLD IT, PAL--I NEED THAT CAB MORE'N YOU!
ACE TRUCKING
SLAMM
YEAH? SEZ WHO?
SEZ ME--
SKRUNCHT
--THE EVER-LOVIN' BLUE-EYED BENJAMIN J. GRIMM!
JONG
STEP ON IT, CABBIE--THE BAXTER BUILDIN'! AND DON'T WORRY-- I'LL PAY FER YER LOUSY DOOR!
ULP! Y-YOU GOT IT, MISTER!
GUESS REED WAS RIGHT...
LEMME OUT!
TAKIN' A CAB'S A LOT MORE EXPENSIVE -- BUT THIS AIN'T NO TIME TA PLAY CHEAPSKATE!
THIS GOOD ENOUGH FOR YOU, MR. FANTASTIC!
YES -- AND YOU HAVE MY GRATITUDE, PILOT!

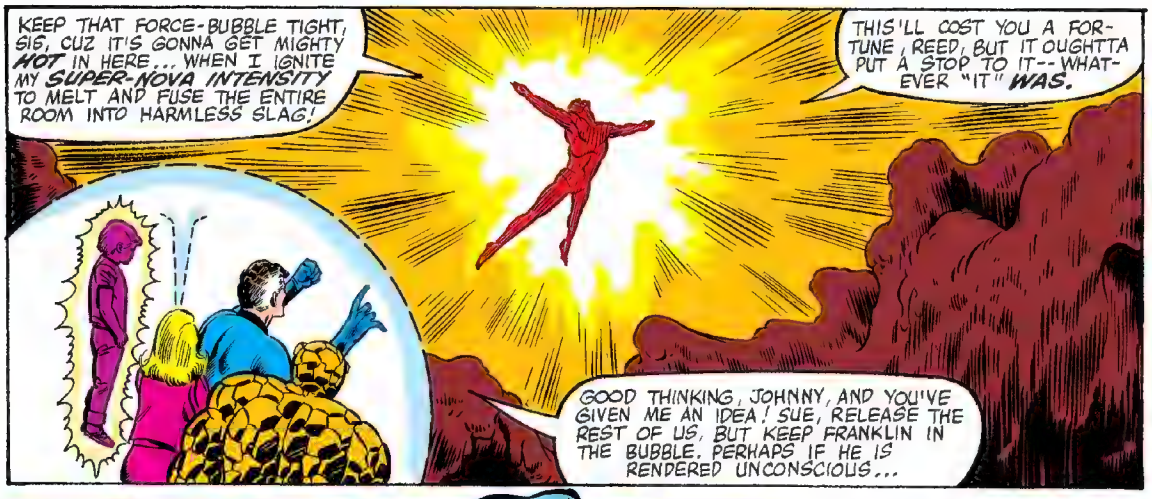

SNAKING THROUGH THE WINDOW, HEEDLESS OF THE AUTOMATIC ALARMS, MR. FANTASTIC CALLS OUT--
SUE! SUE, DARLING, WHERE ARE YOU?!
AND A DEAD, DULL COLD VOICE QUIETLY ANSWERS...
IN HERE, REED... WITH OUR SON.
OUTSIDE...
BAXTER BUILDING
SKRUNCHT
HERE'S A WAD O' DOUGH, PAL -- KEEP THE CHANGE AN' BUY YERSELF FOUR NEW DOORS!
THERE'S BEN -- IN A MEAN HURRY, TOO!
INDEED, FOR AS THE THING BURSTS INTO H.Q. ...
IF THERE'S GONNA BE TROUBLE, I BETTER BE READY FOR IT -- NOT DRESSED LIKE A NINE TA FIVE WIMP!
WHERE ARE YA, SUSIE? STRETCH--?!
IN HERE, BEN -- AT THE ENTRANCE TO THE NEGATIVE ZONE!
I DIDN'T LIKE THE SOUND O' THAT, REED. WHAT'S--
--OH NO!!
HOLD IT, BEN -- I DON'T KNOW WHAT WE'RE DEALING WITH YET!
MY SON... MY POOR SWEET SON...!
AND FOR A MOMENT THERE IS NOTHING BUT SUE'S SOFTLY CROONING MOAN AND THE MALEVOLENT CRACKLE OF ENERGY SPURTING FROM THE NEGATIVE ZONE...
THEN, AS THE TORCH STREAKS INTO THE ROOM...
IT'S LITTLE FRANKIE! BUT WHAT--
FWHOOM
STAY BACK! SOMETHING'S HAPPENING!
DO, SOMETHING, REED--! STOP IT -- HELP HIM!

IN THE DARK REALM, THE HIDEOUS MENTAL PROBE RECOILS FROM THE AERIAL RIFT, SNAPPING BACK INTO THE MIND OF NICHOLAS SCRATCH...
IT'S COMPLETE--I'VE DONE IT! THE PROBE IS NO LONGER NEEDED! HE'S MINE--UNDER MY COMPLETE CONTROL!
AND BACK IN THE BAXTER BUILDING, AS AN EERIE PLASMIC FOG CLEARS...
THE ENERGY-CONDUIT FROM THE NEGATIVE ZONE PORTAL IS GONE--BUT HE'S STILL SURROUNDED BY A CORONA OF FORCE--HOVERING OVER THE FLOOR--AND HIS EYES...
MOMMY, DADDY, UNCLE JOHNNY, UNCLE BEN...
...I'M GLAD YOU'RE ALL HERE...
...BECAUSE I WANT TO KILL YOU!
NO! YOU'RE NOT FRANKLIN! YOU'RE A MONSTER! WHAT HAVE YOU DONE WITH MY SON?! TELL ME OR I'LL--
EASY, SUSIE--YA DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE SAYIN'!
YES I DO! I'LL KILL HIM--KILL HIM!!
STOP IT, SUE! SNAP OUT OF IT!
SWAK
HIT HER AGAIN, DADDY. I LIKE IT WHEN YOU HIT MOMMY.
WATCH HER, BEN!
JOHNNY, HE SEEMS TO BE... POSSESSED--BY SOME FORCE FROM THE NEGATIVE ZONE! AND FOR THE LIFE OF ME, I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO--!
GO TO GREENWICH VILLAGE AND--
SURE, REED--DR. STRANGE MIGHT BE ABLE TO HELP!
GOOD. NOW THERE'S ONLY THREE OF YOU TO KILL, AND LATER I--
LISTEN, FRANKLIN! WE'RE YOUR MOTHER AND FATHER! YOU CAN'T WANT TO... TO KILL US!


SURE I CAN, DADDY, AND I'M GONNA DO IT TOO-- LIKE THIS!!
AGH-H-H!
GET BACK! EXPLOSION OF FORCE FROM HIS EYES--FROM HIS MIND!
REED! ARE YA ALL RIGHT?!
YES, BEN, BUT THAT ERUPTION OF ENERGY-- IT PERMEATED THE ENTIRE ROOM AND--
WATCH OUT, BEN! THE WEAPONS FROM MY EXPERIMENTAL ARSENAL--
--THE FLOORS AND WALLS OF THE ROOM ITSELF--
--ALL MY INVENTIONS AND COMPUTERS-- EVERYTHING'S COME TO BERSERK LIFE-- ANIMATED BY SOME EVIL FORCE FROM FRANKLIN'S MIND!
AND THEY'RE ATTACKING US!
YOU AIN'T KIDDIN', STRETCH! THIS IS WORSE'N FALLIN' INTO ONE O' DOC DOOM'S DEATH-TRAPS!
THEN, RISING ABOVE THE STARK CHAOS, SHRILL ALARMS SCREAM AND CRIMSON LIGHTS FLASH...
SUE! SNAP OUT OF IT! MY GENERATOR'S OUT OF CONTROL!
HIS WIFE DOES NOT REPLY-- BUT FROM HIS SON, HOVERING AT THE EYE OF THE HURRICANE, THERE COMES THE SOFT SOUND OF...GIGGLING.
SUE! YOU'VE GOT TO ERECT A FORCE-FIELD-- SHIELD US BEFORE THE GENERATOR EXPLODES!
STILL NO REPLY..BUT LOUDER GIGGLING.

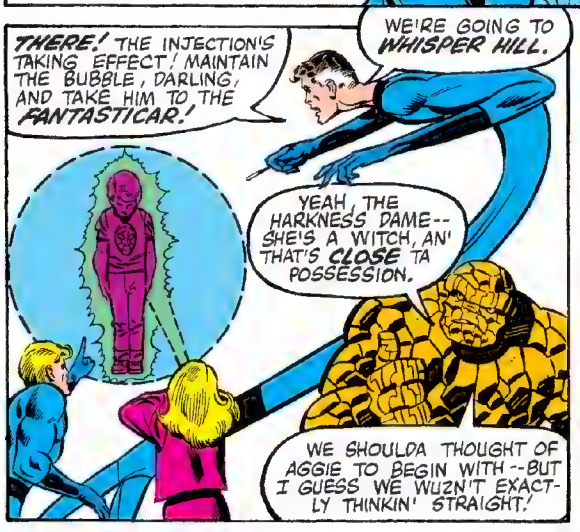

GREENWICH VILLAGE...
THERE IT IS--DOC STRANGE'S PLACE EVEN FROM THE OUTSIDE, IT'S SPOOKY, LIKE IT DOESN'T BELONG, DOESN'T FIT--
LIKE PANDORA'S BOX HIDING AMONG A BUNCH OF EMPTY SHOEBOXES.
BUT THE MAN WHO LIVES IN THAT PLACE MAY BE THE ONLY ONE IN THE WORLD WHO CAN HELP!
DOUSING HIS FLAME AS HE HITS THE FORBODING DOORSTEP--
BAM BAM BAM
HEY, OPEN UP!
JOHNNY STORM, IS IT NOT?
YES, WONG. REED NEEDS HELP--ASKED ME TO COME GET DOC STRANGE.
I AM SURE THE MASTER WOULD INDEED ASSIST THE FANTASTIC FOUR... WERE HE HERE. BUT HE IS NOT, AND I HAVE NO WAY OF CONTACTING HIM.
PERHAPS I COULD OFFER SOME ASSISTANCE...?
I REALLY DOUBT IT, WONG, BUT THANKS ANYWAY.
SORRY I CAN'T EXPLAIN, BUT I'M IN A BIG HURRY!
AS JOHNNY AGAIN FLAMES ON, THE GLOW BRIEFLY ILLUMINES A DARK FIGURE IN AN ADJACENT DOORWAY...
NO TIME TO WASTE! GOT TO GET BACK BEFORE SOMETHING HAPPENS TO THAT KID!
THE TORCH'S LIGHT FADES, AND THE FIGURE GLIDES FROM COMFORTING DARKNESS...
PHONE
...HER MIND FOCUSED ON THE MAN SHE MUST CONTACT...
...A MAN WHO ALSO FINDS COMFORT IN GLOOM, SUCCOR IN SHADOWS, SEATED IN HIS OFFICE ON THE 13TH FLOOR OF THE EMPIRE STATE BUILDING, SURROUNDED BY ICONS OF CONQUERED FOES. FOR LONG MOMENTS HE SEEMS LOST IN HEAVY THOUGHT, BUT THEN HIS HEAD SUDDENLY TILTS, AS IF IN RESPONSE TO A SILENT SUMMONS...
AND HIS HAND REACHES FOR THE PHONE, BEFORE EVEN THE FIRST RING...
ARCANOS MALEFICARUM

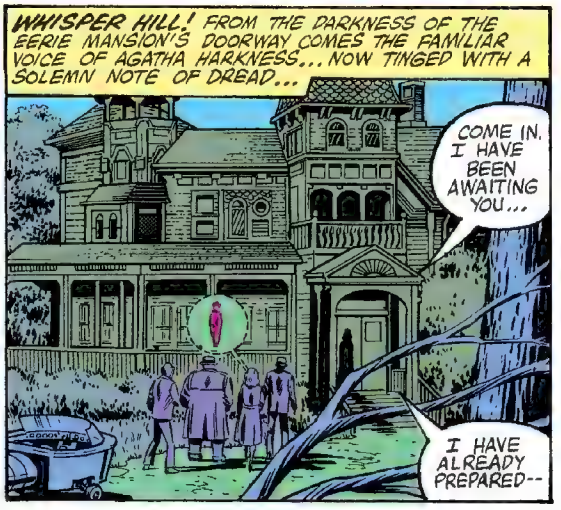

THERE IS... TROUBLE, GABRIEL.
HER VOICE IS LOW, SOFT, MYSTERIOUS.
YES, DESADIA, I KNOW, I FEEL IT TOO.
IT IS... DIFFERENT THIS TIME, GABRIEL... BUT NO LESS DANGEROUS.
I KNOW,
THEN FAREWELL, GABRIEL. HAVE STRENGTH.
HE CRADLES THE PHONE, TURNING TO THE EMPTY ROOM'S SHADOWS...
YES, I HAVE STRENGTH.
AND YOU KNOW IT, DON'T YOU? EVEN HIDING THERE IN THE SLIMY SHADOWS, YOU KNOW WE ARE ABOUT TO MEET AGAIN, MY FILTHY FRIEND.
AND THE SHADOWS SEEM TO... SHIFT.
LOUSY GIZMOS DON'T EVEN KNOW WHO THEIR REAL FRIENDS ARE!
LISTEN TO ME, SUE! IT'S FRANKLIN -- HE'S THE KEY, THE SOURCE! STOP HIM AND WE'D STOP THESE INSANE ATTACKS!
SKRAK
BUT WE CAN'T! WE DARE NOT STRIKE AT OUR OWN CHILD!
DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND?! WE CAN ONLY DEFEND OURSELVES! MY GENERATOR IS ABOUT TO EXPLODE! WE NEED THE PROTECTION OF YOUR FORCE-SHIELD BEFORE--
BAOUM
WH-WHAT--?! REED... WHAT'S HAPPENING?! I... WAS IN A DAZE!
THANK HEAVENS, SUE--YOU ERECTED YOUR FORCE-SHIELD JUST IN TIME! IF I HADN'T GOTTEN THROUGH TO YOU--
SUE! STRENGTHEN YOUR FORCE-BUBBLE--AND INCLUDE FRANKLIN!
IT'S THE TORCH--RETURNING FROM GREENWICH VILLAGE. DO AS HE SAYS, DARLING!
NO DICE WITH DOC STRANGE, PEOPLE, SO THE NEXT STEP'S UP TO ME...

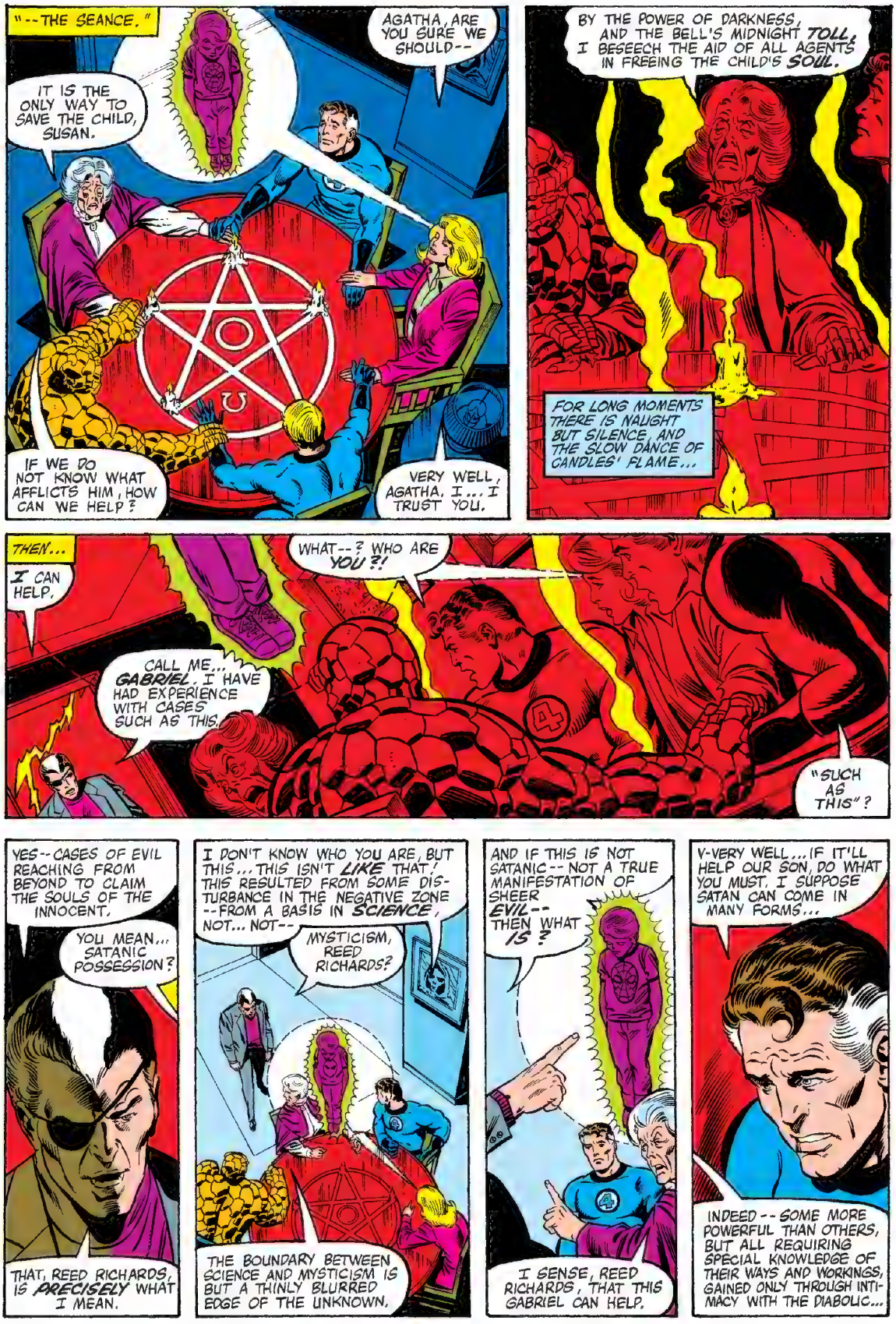

KEEP THAT FORCE-BUBBLE TIGHT, SIS, CUZ IT'S GONNA GET MIGHTY HOT IN HERE... WHEN I IGNITE MY SUPER-NOVA INTENSITY TO MELT AND FUSE THE ENTIRE ROOM INTO HARMLESS SLAG!
THIS'LL COST YOU A FORTUNE, REED, BUT IT OUGHTTA PUT A STOP TO IT-- WHATEVER "IT" WAS.
GOOD THINKING, JOHNNY, AND YOU'VE GIVEN ME AN IDEA! SUE, RELEASE THE REST OF US, BUT KEEP FRANKLIN IN THE BUBBLE. PERHAPS IF HE IS RENDERED UNCONSCIOUS...

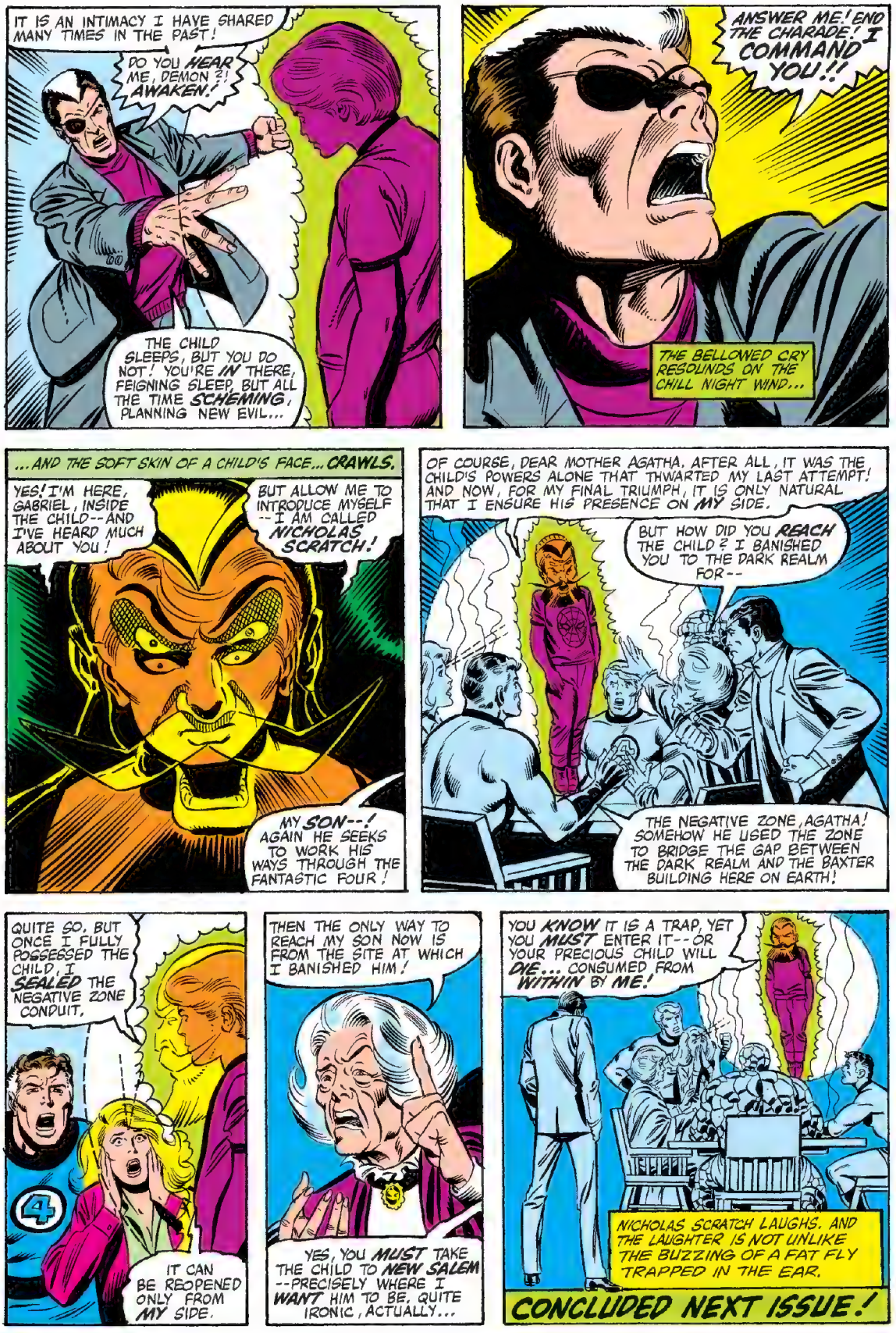
SENSING PERIL, THE EVIL FORCE WITHIN FRANKLIN RICHARDS ABRUPTLY LASHES OUT IN FURY...
BUT REED--! YOU SAID WE COULDN'T HARM--
I'M JUST GOING TO INJECT A SEDATIVE, SUE-- PUT HIM OUT FOR A FEW HOURS UNTIL WE CAN COME UP WITH SOMETHING BETTER. OPEN THE BUBBLE ENOUGH FOR MY ARMS TO ENTER--

AND-- THE PAIN--! HE'S RELEASING AN AWESOME AMOUNT OF ENERGY-- BURNING MY ARMS--!
HURRY, REED-- I CAN'T CONTAIN THE BUBBLE MUCH LONGER!


THERE! THE INJECTION'S TAKING EFFECT! MAINTAIN THE BUBBLE, DARLING, AND TAKE HIM TO THE FANTASTICAR!
WE'RE GOING TO WHISPER HILL.
YEAH, THE HARKNESS DAME-- SHE'S A WITCH, AN' THAT'S CLOSE TA POSSESSION.
WE SHOULDA THOUGHT OF AGGIE TO BEGIN WITH--BUT I GUESS WE WUZN'T EXACTLY THINKIN' STRAIGHT.


WHISPER HILL! FROM THE DARKNESS OF THE EERIE MANSION'S DOORWAY COMES THE FAMILIAR VOICE OF AGATHA HARKNESS... NOW TINGED WITH A SOLEMN NOTE OF DREAD...
COME IN. I HAVE BEEN AWAITING YOU...
I HAVE ALREADY PREPARED--


"--THE SEANCE."
AGATHA, ARE YOU SURE WE SHOULD--
IT IS THE ONLY WAY TO SAVE THE CHILD, SUSAN.
IF WE DO NOT KNOW WHAT AFFLICTS HIM, HOW CAN WE HELP?
VERY WELL, AGATHA, I... I TRUST YOU.
BY THE POWER OF DARKNESS, AND THE BELL'S MIDNIGHT TOLL, I BESEECH THE AID OF ALL AGENTS IN FREEING THE CHILD'S SOUL.
FOR LONG MOMENTS THERE IS NAUGHT BUT SILENCE, AND THE SLOW DANCE OF CANDLES' FLAME...
THEN...
I CAN HELP.
WHAT--? WHO ARE YOU?!
CALL ME... GABRIEL. I HAVE HAD EXPERIENCE WITH CASES SUCH AS THIS.
"SUCH AS THIS"?
YES--CASES OF EVIL REACHING FROM BEYOND TO CLAIM THE SOULS OF THE INNOCENT.
YOU MEAN... SATANIC POSSESSION?
THAT, REED RICHARDS, IS PRECISELY WHAT I MEAN.
I DON'T KNOW WHO YOU ARE, BUT THIS... THIS ISN'T LIKE THAT! THIS RESULTED FROM SOME DISTURBANCE IN THE NEGATIVE ZONE --FROM A BASIS IN SCIENCE, NOT... NOT--
MYSTICISM, REED RICHARDS?
THE BOUNDARY BETWEEN SCIENCE AND MYSTICISM IS BUT A THINLY BLURRED EDGE OF THE UNKNOWN.
AND IF THIS IS NOT SATANIC--NOT A TRUE MANIFESTATION OF SHEER EVIL--THEN WHAT IS?
I SENSE, REED RICHARDS, THAT THIS GABRIEL CAN HELP.
V-VERY WELL... IF IT'LL HELP OUR SON, DO WHAT YOU MUST. I SUPPOSE SATAN CAN COME IN MANY FORMS...
INDEED--SOME MORE POWERFUL THAN OTHERS, BUT ALL REQUIRING SPECIAL KNOWLEDGE OF THEIR WAYS AND WORKINGS, GAINED ONLY THROUGH INTIMACY WITH THE DIABOLIC...


IT IS AN INTIMACY I HAVE SHARED MANY TIMES IN THE PAST!
DO YOU HEAR ME, DEMON?! AWAKEN!
THE CHILD SLEEPS, BUT YOU DO NOT! YOU'RE IN THERE, FEIGNING SLEEP, BUT ALL THE TIME SCHEMING, PLANNING NEW EVIL...
ANSWER ME! END THE CHARADE! I COMMAND YOU!!
THE BELLOWED CRY RESOUNDS ON THE CHILL NIGHT WIND...
...AND THE SOFT SKIN OF A CHILD'S FACE... CRAWLS.
YES! I'M HERE, GABRIEL, INSIDE THE CHILD--AND I'VE HEARD MUCH ABOUT YOU!
BUT ALLOW ME TO INTRODUCE MYSELF --I AM CALLED NICHOLAS SCRATCH!
MY SON--! AGAIN HE SEEKS TO WORK HIS WAYS THROUGH THE FANTASTIC FOUR!
OF COURSE, DEAR MOTHER AGATHA. AFTER ALL, IT WAS THE CHILD'S POWERS ALONE THAT THWARTED MY LAST ATTEMPT! AND NOW, FOR MY FINAL TRIUMPH, IT IS ONLY NATURAL THAT I ENSURE HIS PRESENCE ON MY SIDE.
BUT HOW DID YOU REACH THE CHILD? I BANISHED YOU TO THE DARK REALM FOR--
THE NEGATIVE ZONE, AGATHA! SOMEHOW HE USED THE ZONE TO BRIDGE THE GAP BETWEEN THE DARK REALM AND THE BAXTER BUILDING HERE ON EARTH!
QUITE SO. BUT ONCE I FULLY POSSESSED THE CHILD, I SEALED THE NEGATIVE ZONE CONDUIT.
IT CAN BE REOPENED ONLY FROM MY SIDE.
THEN THE ONLY WAY TO REACH MY SON NOW IS FROM THE SITE AT WHICH I BANISHED HIM!
YES, YOU MUST TAKE THE CHILD TO NEW SALEM --PRECISELY WHERE I WANT HIM TO BE. QUITE IRONIC, ACTUALLY...
YOU KNOW IT IS A TRAP, YET YOU MUST ENTER IT--OR YOUR PRECIOUS CHILD WILL DIE... CONSUMED FROM WITHIN BY ME!
NICHOLAS SCRATCH LAUGHS. AND THE LAUGHTER IS NOT UNLIKE THE BUZZING OF A FAT FLY TRAPPED IN THE EAR.
CONCLUDED NEXT ISSUE!

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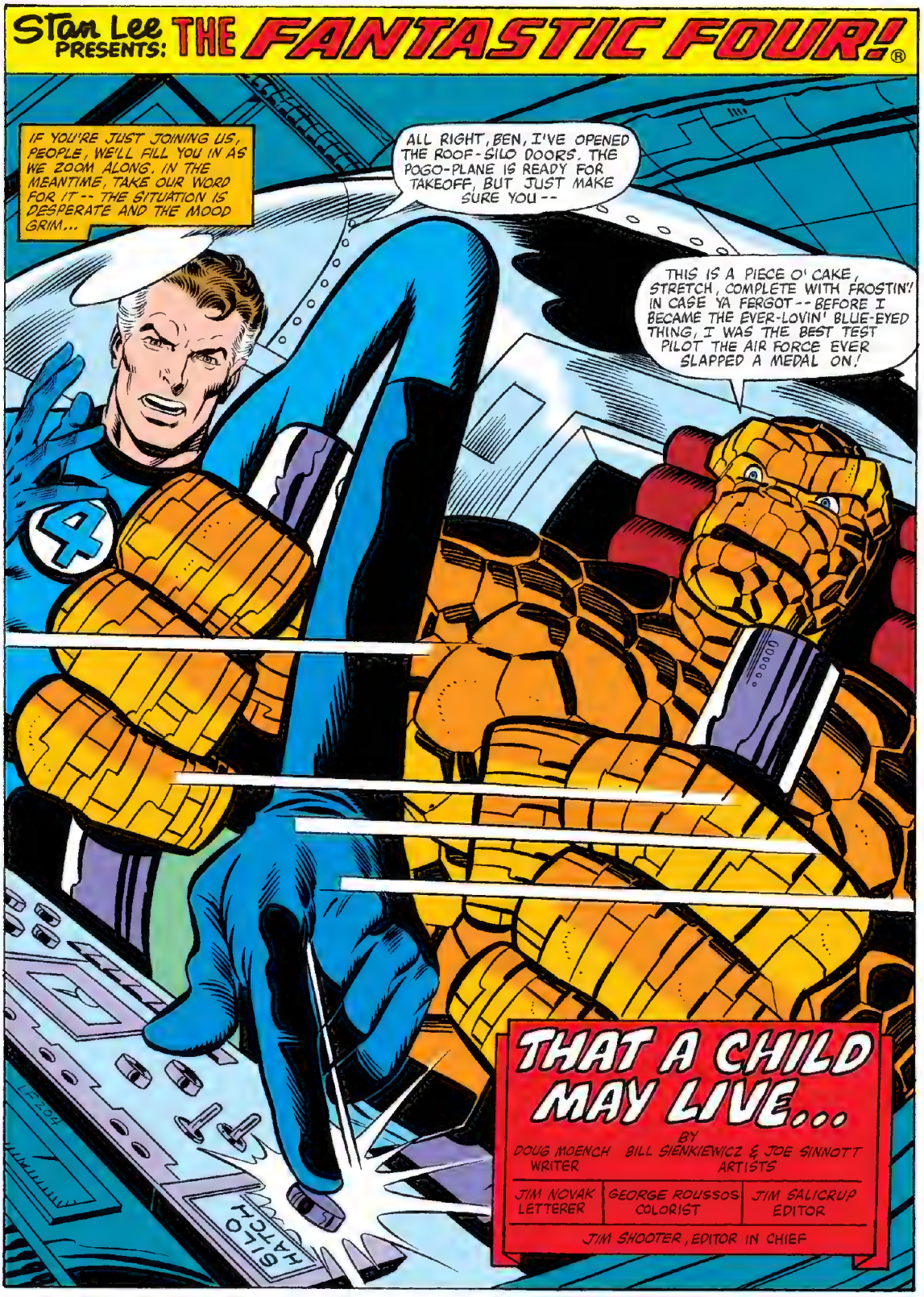
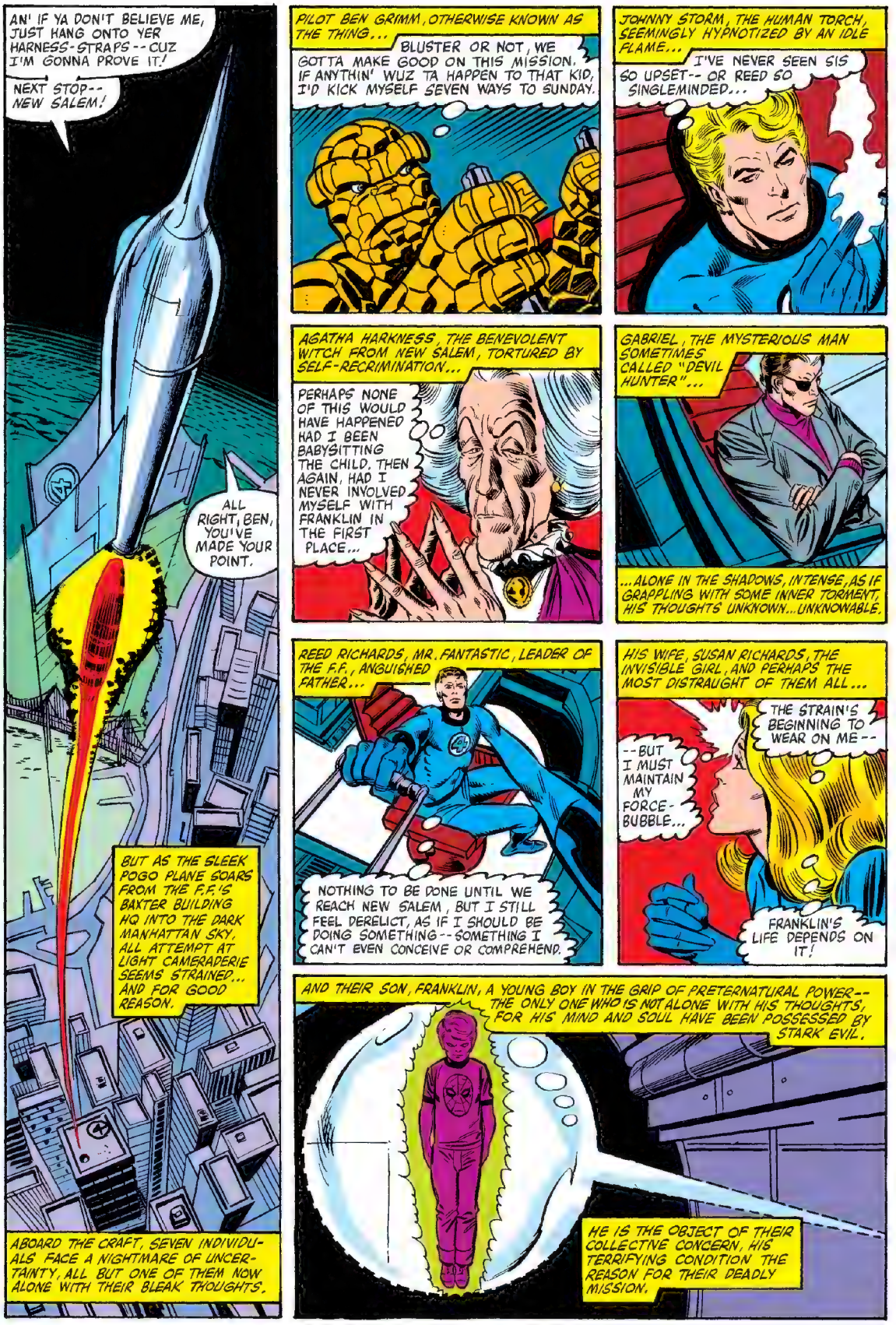
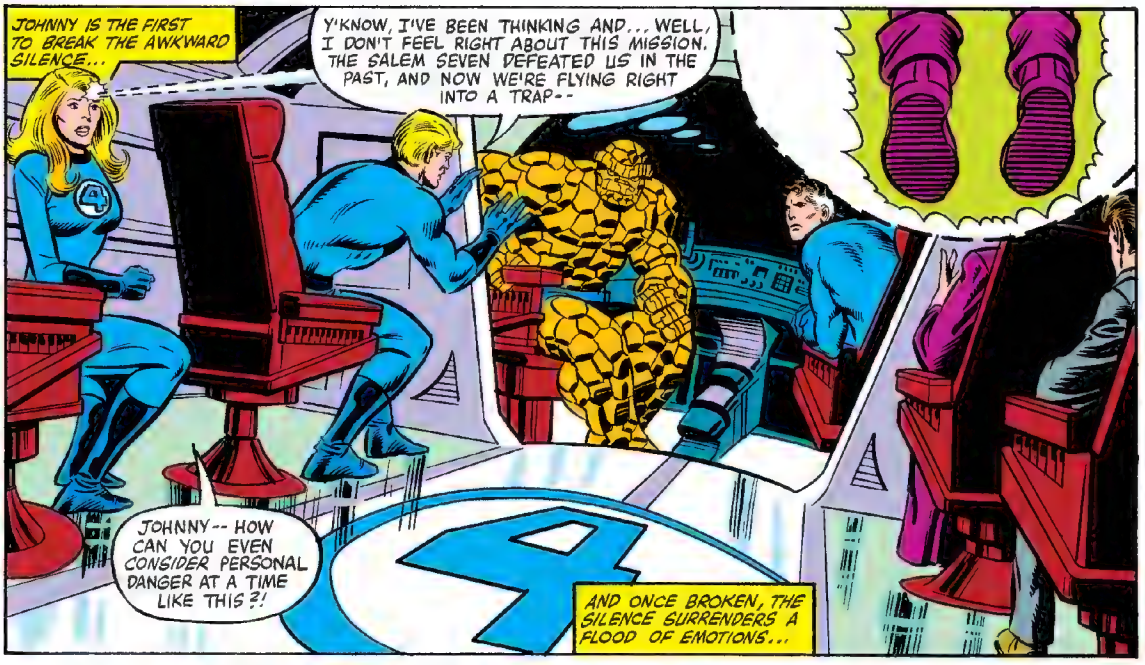
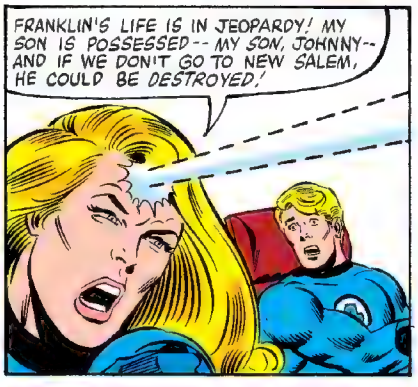
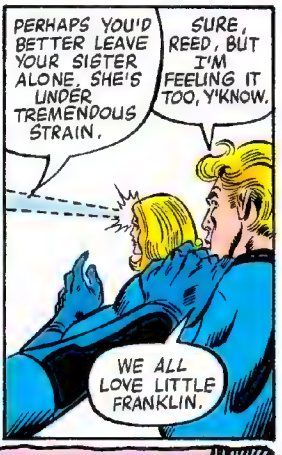

STan Lee PRESENTS: THE FANTASTIC FOUR!®
IF YOU'RE JUST JOINING US, PEOPLE, WE'LL FILL YOU IN AS WE ZOOM ALONG. IN THE MEANTIME, TAKE OUR WORD FOR IT -- THE SITUATION IS DESPERATE AND THE MOOD GRIM...
ALL RIGHT, BEN, I'VE OPENED THE ROOF-SILO DOORS. THE POGO-PLANE IS READY FOR TAKEOFF, BUT JUST MAKE SURE YOU --
THIS IS A PIECE O' CAKE, STRETCH, COMPLETE WITH FROSTIN'! IN CASE YA FERGOT -- BEFORE I BECAME THE EVER-LOVIN' BLUE-EYED THING, I WAS THE BEST TEST PILOT THE AIR FORCE EVER SLAPPED A MEDAL ON!
SILO HATCH
THAT A CHILD MAY LIVE...
BY
DOUG MOENCH WRITER
BILL SIENKIEWICZ & JOE SINNOTT ARTISTS
JIM NOVAK LETTERER
GEORGE ROUSSOS COLORIST
JIM SALICRUP EDITOR
JIM SHOOTER, EDITOR IN CHIEF

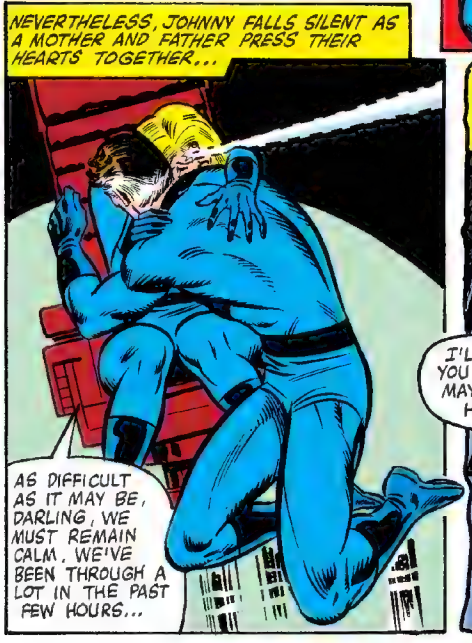

AN' IF YA DON'T BELIEVE ME, JUST HANG ONTO YER HARNESS-STRAPS--CUZ I'M GONNA PROVE IT!
NEXT STOP-- NEW SALEM!
ALL RIGHT, BEN, YOU'VE MADE YOUR POINT.
BUT AS THE SLEEK POGO PLANE SOARS FROM THE F.F.'S BAXTER BUILDING HQ INTO THE DARK MANHATTAN SKY, ALL ATTEMPT AT LIGHT CAMERADERIE SEEMS STRAINED... AND FOR GOOD REASON.
ABOARD THE CRAFT, SEVEN INDIVIDUALS FACE A NIGHTMARE OF UNCERTAINTY, ALL BUT ONE OF THEM NOW ALONE WITH THEIR BLEAK THOUGHTS.
PILOT BEN GRIMM, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS THE THING...
BLUSTER OR NOT, WE GOTTA MAKE GOOD ON THIS MISSION. IF ANYTHIN' WUZ TA HAPPEN TO THAT KID, I'D KICK MYSELF SEVEN WAYS TO SUNDAY.
JOHNNY STORM, THE HUMAN TORCH, SEEMINGLY HYPNOTIZED BY AN IDLE FLAME...
I'VE NEVER SEEN SIS SO UPSET-- OR REED SO SINGLEMINDED...
AGATHA HARKNESS, THE BENEVOLENT WITCH FROM NEW SALEM, TORTURED BY SELF-RECRIMINATION...
PERHAPS NONE OF THIS WOULD HAVE HAPPENED HAD I BEEN BABYSITTING THE CHILD. THEN AGAIN, HAD I NEVER INVOLVED MYSELF WITH FRANKLIN IN THE FIRST PLACE...
GABRIEL, THE MYSTERIOUS MAN SOMETIMES CALLED "DEVIL HUNTER"...
...ALONE IN THE SHADOWS, INTENSE, AS IF GRAPPLING WITH SOME INNER TORMENT, HIS THOUGHTS UNKNOWN...UNKNOWABLE.
REED RICHARDS, MR. FANTASTIC, LEADER OF THE F.F., ANGUISHED FATHER...
NOTHING TO BE DONE UNTIL WE REACH NEW SALEM, BUT I STILL FEEL DERELICT, AS IF I SHOULD BE DOING SOMETHING--SOMETHING I CAN'T EVEN CONCEIVE OR COMPREHEND.
HIS WIFE, SUSAN RICHARDS, THE INVISIBLE GIRL, AND PERHAPS THE MOST DISTRAUGHT OF THEM ALL...
--BUT I MUST MAINTAIN MY FORCE-BUBBLE...
THE STRAIN'S BEGINNING TO WEAR ON ME--
FRANKLIN'S LIFE DEPENDS ON IT!
AND THEIR SON, FRANKLIN, A YOUNG BOY IN THE GRIP OF PRETERNATURAL POWER-- THE ONLY ONE WHO IS NOT ALONE WITH HIS THOUGHTS, FOR HIS MIND AND SOUL HAVE BEEN POSSESSED BY STARK EVIL.
HE IS THE OBJECT OF THEIR COLLECTIVE CONCERN, HIS TERRIFYING CONDITION THE REASON FOR THEIR DEADLY MISSION.


JOHNNY IS THE FIRST TO BREAK THE AWKWARD SILENCE...
Y'KNOW, I'VE BEEN THINKING AND... WELL, I DON'T FEEL RIGHT ABOUT THIS MISSION. THE SALEM SEVEN DEFEATED US IN THE PAST, AND NOW WE'RE FLYING RIGHT INTO A TRAP--
JOHNNY-- HOW CAN YOU EVEN CONSIDER PERSONAL DANGER AT A TIME LIKE THIS?!
AND ONCE BROKEN, THE SILENCE SURRENDERS A FLOOD OF EMOTIONS...


FRANKLIN'S LIFE IS IN JEOPARDY! MY SON IS POSSESSED-- MY SON, JOHNNY-- AND IF WE DON'T GO TO NEW SALEM, HE COULD BE DESTROYED!

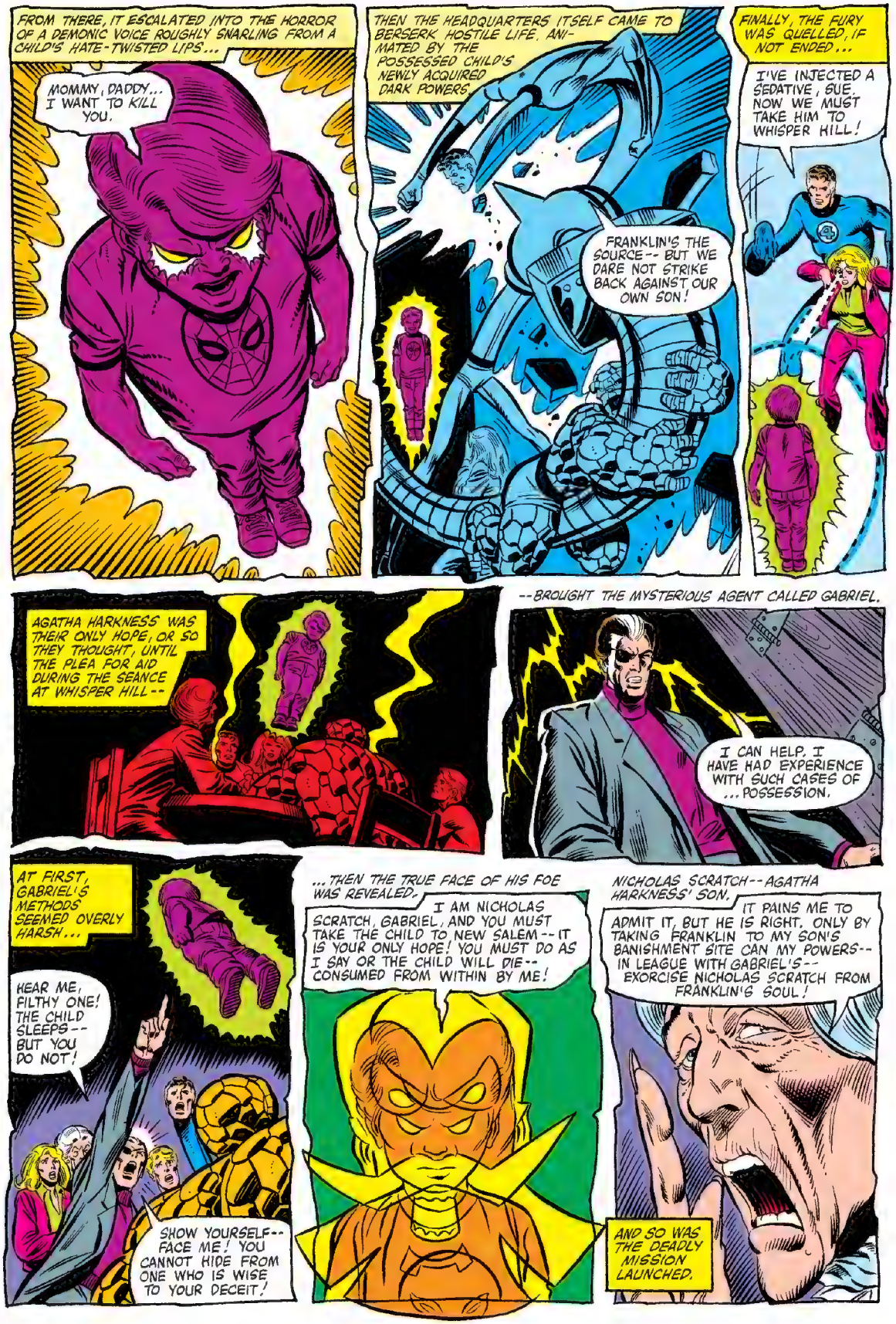
HEY-- EASY, SIS. I DIDN'T MEAN WE SHOULDN'T GO. I JUST MEANT THAT MAYBE WE SHOULD BE MORE CAUTIOUS AND--
THERE'S NO TIME FOR CAUTION, JOHNNY.


PERHAPS YOU'D BETTER LEAVE YOUR SISTER ALONE. SHE'S UNDER TREMENDOUS STRAIN.
SURE, REED, BUT I'M FEELING IT TOO, Y'KNOW.
WE ALL LOVE LITTLE FRANKLIN.

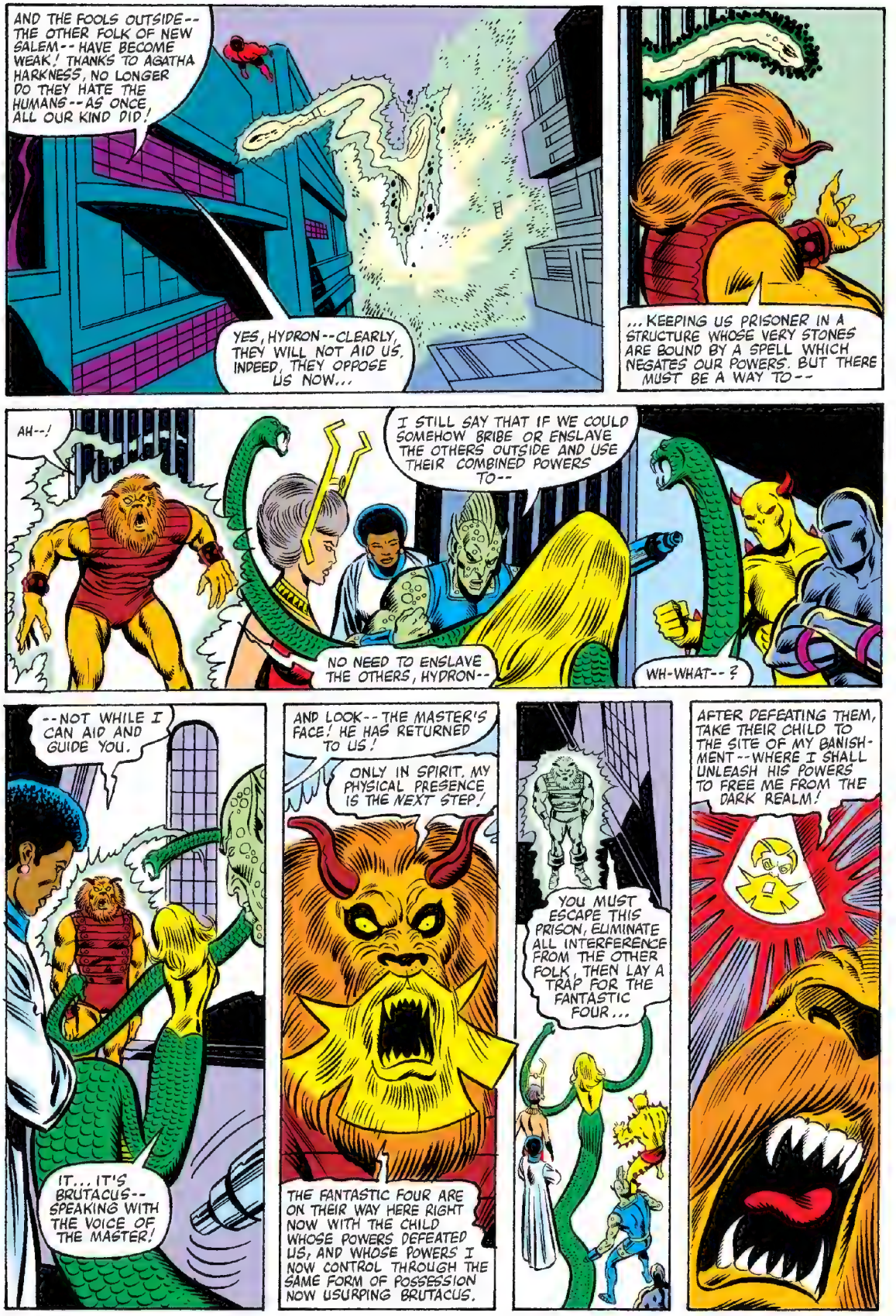

NEVERTHELESS, JOHNNY FALLS SILENT AS A MOTHER AND FATHER PRESS THEIR HEARTS TOGETHER...
AS DIFFICULT AS IT MAY BE, DARLING, WE MUST REMAIN CALM. WE'VE BEEN THROUGH A LOT IN THE PAST FEW HOURS...

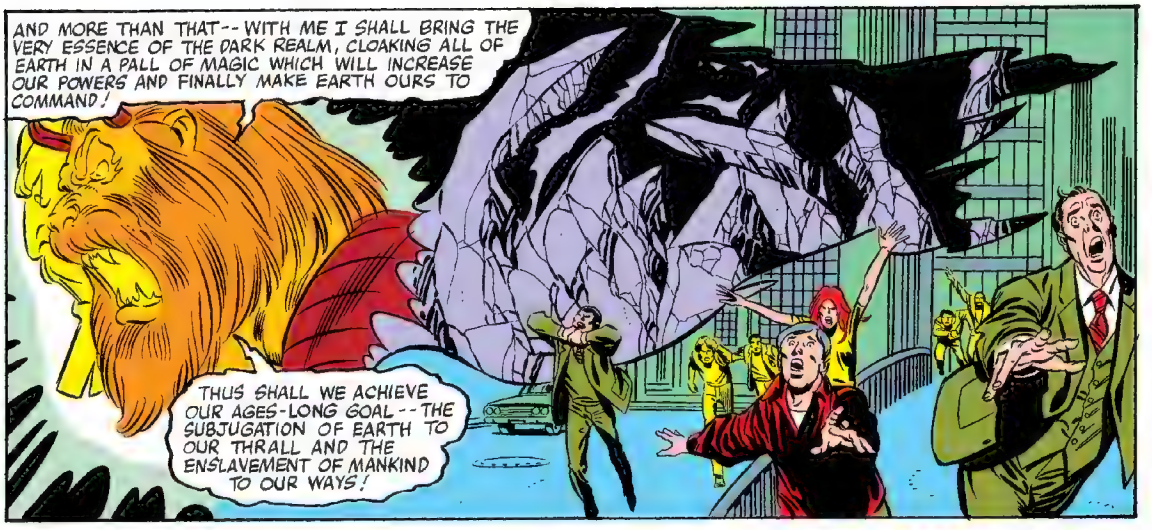
"A LOT.": IT FLASHES THROUGH THEIR MINDS, JAGGED SHARDS OF THE MIRROR CALLED MEMORY...
I'LL FIND YOU, MOMMY-- MAYBE IN HERE!
IT BEGAN WITH A SIMPLE GAME OF HIDE AND SEEK PLAYED BY A MISCHIEVOUS MOTHER AND HER GAMIN-FACED SON...

...AND IT LED TO SHOCKING TRAGEDY.
HE'S SURROUNDED BY SOME KIND OF ENERGY EMANATING FROM THE NEGATIVE ZONE!
MY SON... MY SON!

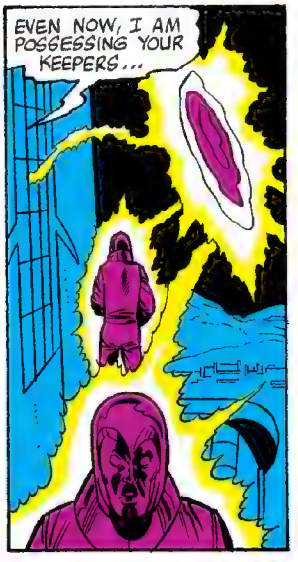

FROM THERE, IT ESCALATED INTO THE HORROR OF A DEMONIC VOICE ROUGHLY SNARLING FROM A CHILD'S HATE-TWISTED LIPS...
MOMMY, DADDY... I WANT TO KILL YOU.
THEN THE HEADQUARTERS ITSELF CAME TO BERSERK HOSTILE LIFE, ANIMATED BY THE POSSESSED CHILD'S NEWLY ACQUIRED DARK POWERS.
FRANKLIN'S THE SOURCE-- BUT WE DARE NOT STRIKE BACK AGAINST OUR OWN SON!
FINALLY, THE FURY WAS QUELLED, IF NOT ENDED...
I'VE INJECTED A SEDATIVE, SUE. NOW WE MUST TAKE HIM TO WHISPER HILL!
AGATHA HARKNESS WAS THEIR ONLY HOPE, OR SO THEY THOUGHT, UNTIL THE PLEA FOR AID DURING THE SEANCE AT WHISPER HILL--
--BROUGHT THE MYSTERIOUS AGENT CALLED GABRIEL.
I CAN HELP. I HAVE HAD EXPERIENCE WITH SUCH CASES OF ...POSSESSION.
AT FIRST, GABRIEL'S METHODS SEEMED OVERLY HARSH...
HEAR ME, FILTHY ONE! THE CHILD SLEEPS-- BUT YOU DO NOT!
SHOW YOURSELF-- FACE ME! YOU CANNOT HIDE FROM ONE WHO IS WISE TO YOUR DECEIT!
...THEN THE TRUE FACE OF HIS FOE WAS REVEALED.
I AM NICHOLAS SCRATCH, GABRIEL, AND YOU MUST TAKE THE CHILD TO NEW SALEM-- IT IS YOUR ONLY HOPE! YOU MUST DO AS I SAY OR THE CHILD WILL DIE-- CONSUMED FROM WITHIN BY ME!
NICHOLAS SCRATCH--AGATHA HARKNESS' SON.
IT PAINS ME TO ADMIT IT, BUT HE IS RIGHT. ONLY BY TAKING FRANKLIN TO MY SON'S BANISHMENT SITE CAN MY POWERS-- IN LEAGUE WITH GABRIEL'S-- EXORCISE NICHOLAS SCRATCH FROM FRANKLIN'S SOUL!
AND SO WAS THE DEADLY MISSION LAUNCHED.

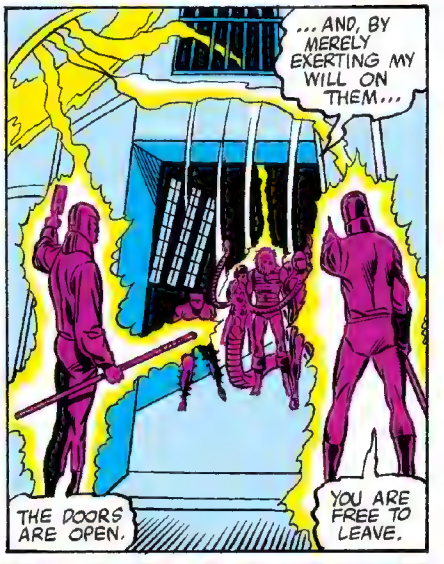
NOW, AS THE MEMORIES AGAIN TURN INWARD...
...AND EVEN THOUGH THE NEAR FUTURE WILL BE JUST AS BAD, WE MUST HAVE FAITH, TRUST, CONFIDENCE IN OURSELVES.
I...I KNOW, REED, BUT IT'S JUST THAT... HEAVEN HELP ME, IF ANYTHING HAPPENS TO OUR SON I DON'T THINK I COULD--
HUSH, DARLING, NOTHING WILL HAPPEN. I'D LAY DOWN MY OWN LIFE BEFORE I'D LET A VILLAIN LIKE SCRATCH HARM A HAIR ON FRANKLIN'S HEAD. YOU HAVE MY WORD ON THAT.
I...I KNOW THAT, REED... AND I... I TRUST YOU.
AND WHAT OF NICHOLAS SCRATCH HIMSELF? WHILE A PORTION OF HIS PSYCHE LIES DORMANT IN FRANKLIN'S SOUL, SCRATCH'S PHYSICAL PRESENCE REMAINS IN THE DARK REALM--THE BARREN COSMIC NEVERWHERE TO WHICH HE HAS BEEN BANISHED BY HIS MOTHER AGATHA HARKNESS...
I MUST REOPEN THE GATEWAY TO THE NEGATIVE ZONE, AGAIN USING IT AS A CONDUIT TO BRIDGE THE GAP BETWEEN THE DARK REALM AND EARTH...
BUT THIS TIME, INSTEAD OF BREACHING THE FANTASTIC FOUR'S HEADQUARTERS IN NEW YORK--
"--I MUST OPEN THE WAY TO NEW SALEM."
IT NESTLES IN THE COLORADO MOUNTAINS, AN ENCHANTED VILLAGE OF WITCHES, INVISIBLE TO MORTAL EYES.
THE TWO GUARDS OUTSIDE THE PRISON DO NOT NOTICE THE EERIE SHIMMER STIRRING THE AIR ABOVE AND BEYOND THEM...
INSIDE, THE SALEM SEVEN ARE RESTIVE CAPTIVES: VERTIGO, BRUTACUS, HYDRON, VAKUME, THORNN, REPTILLA AND GAZELLE.
ESCAPE, BRUTACUS? WE HAVE HEARD YOU SPEAK OF NOTHING ELSE FOR MONTHS. PERHAPS YOU'D CARE TO SHARE THE DETAILS...?
BAH! WE SHOULDN'T EVEN BE HERE, VERTIGO! WE HAD THE FANTASTIC FOUR DEFEATED--UNTIL THEY WERE SAVED BY THE AWESOME POWERS OF THEIR CHILD!*
GRANTED, WE WOULD HAVE TRIUMPHED, BUT WE DID NOT. NOW, THE ONLY WAY OUT DEPENDS ON CONTACT WITH OUR MASTER, NICHOLAS SCRATCH.
BUT HOW, GAZELLE? HE HAS BEEN BANISHED TO THE DARK REALM.
*F.F. ANNUAL #14. -- JIM.

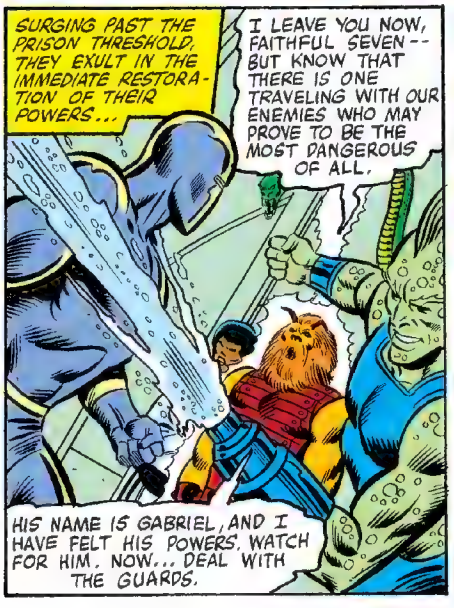

AND THE FOOLS OUTSIDE--THE OTHER FOLK OF NEW SALEM--HAVE BECOME WEAK! THANKS TO AGATHA HARKNESS, NO LONGER DO THEY HATE THE HUMANS--AS ONCE ALL OUR KIND DID!
YES, HYDRON--CLEARLY, THEY WILL NOT AID US, INDEED, THEY OPPOSE US NOW...
...KEEPING US PRISONER IN A STRUCTURE WHOSE VERY STONES ARE BOUND BY A SPELL WHICH NEGATES OUR POWERS. BUT THERE MUST BE A WAY TO--
AH--!
I STILL SAY THAT IF WE COULD SOMEHOW BRIBE OR ENSLAVE THE OTHERS OUTSIDE AND USE THEIR COMBINED POWERS TO--
NO NEED TO ENSLAVE THE OTHERS, HYDRON--
WH-WHAT--?
--NOT WHILE I CAN AID AND GUIDE YOU.
IT... IT'S BRUTACUS--SPEAKING WITH THE VOICE OF THE MASTER!
AND LOOK--THE MASTER'S FACE! HE HAS RETURNED TO US!
ONLY IN SPIRIT, MY PHYSICAL PRESENCE IS THE NEXT STEP!
THE FANTASTIC FOUR ARE ON THEIR WAY HERE RIGHT NOW WITH THE CHILD WHOSE POWERS DEFEATED US, AND WHOSE POWERS I NOW CONTROL THROUGH THE SAME FORM OF POSSESSION NOW USURPING BRUTACUS.
YOU MUST ESCAPE THIS PRISON, ELIMINATE ALL INTERFERENCE FROM THE OTHER FOLK, THEN LAY A TRAP FOR THE FANTASTIC FOUR...
AFTER DEFEATING THEM, TAKE THEIR CHILD TO THE SITE OF MY BANISHMENT--WHERE I SHALL UNLEASH HIS POWERS TO FREE ME FROM THE DARK REALM!


AND MORE THAN THAT--WITH ME I SHALL BRING THE VERY ESSENCE OF THE DARK REALM, CLOAKING ALL OF EARTH IN A PALL OF MAGIC WHICH WILL INCREASE OUR POWERS AND FINALLY MAKE EARTH OURS TO COMMAND!
THUS SHALL WE ACHIEVE OUR AGES-LONG GOAL--THE SUBJUGATION OF EARTH TO OUR THRALL AND THE ENSLAVEMENT OF MANKIND TO OUR WAYS!

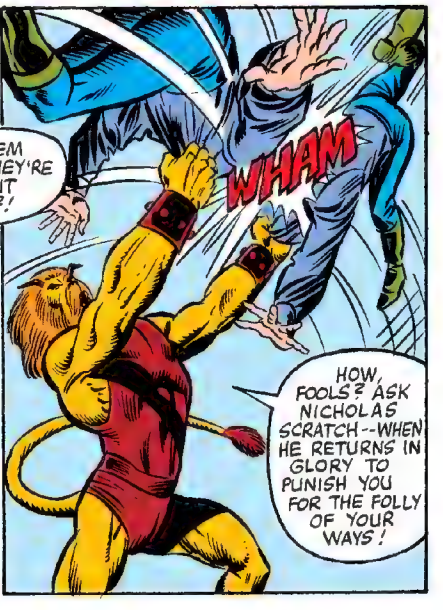
BUT FIRST WE MUST ESCAPE THIS PRISON, MASTER NICHOLAS, AND WE CANNOT DO SO WHILE--
THAT SOLUTION IS SIMPLE, GAZELLE.


EVEN NOW, I AM POSSESSING YOUR KEEPERS...

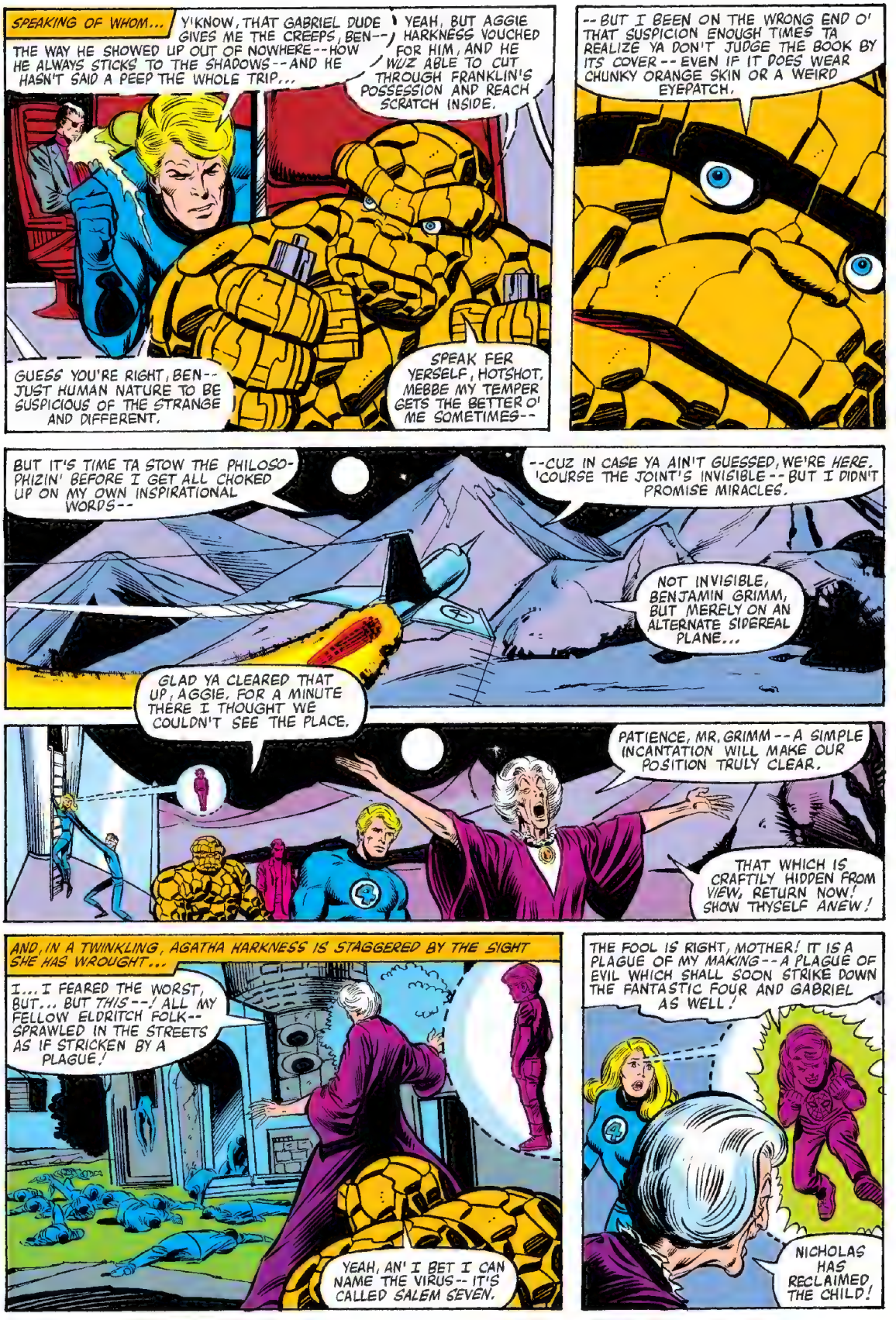

...AND, BY MERELY EXERTING MY WILL ON THEM...
THE DOORS ARE OPEN.
YOU ARE FREE TO LEAVE.


SURGING PAST THE PRISON THRESHOLD, THEY EXULT IN THE IMMEDIATE RESTORATION OF THEIR POWERS...
I LEAVE YOU NOW, FAITHFUL SEVEN--BUT KNOW THAT THERE IS ONE TRAVELING WITH OUR ENEMIES WHO MAY PROVE TO BE THE MOST DANGEROUS OF ALL.
HIS NAME IS GABRIEL, AND I HAVE FELT HIS POWERS. WATCH FOR HIM. NOW... DEAL WITH THE GUARDS.

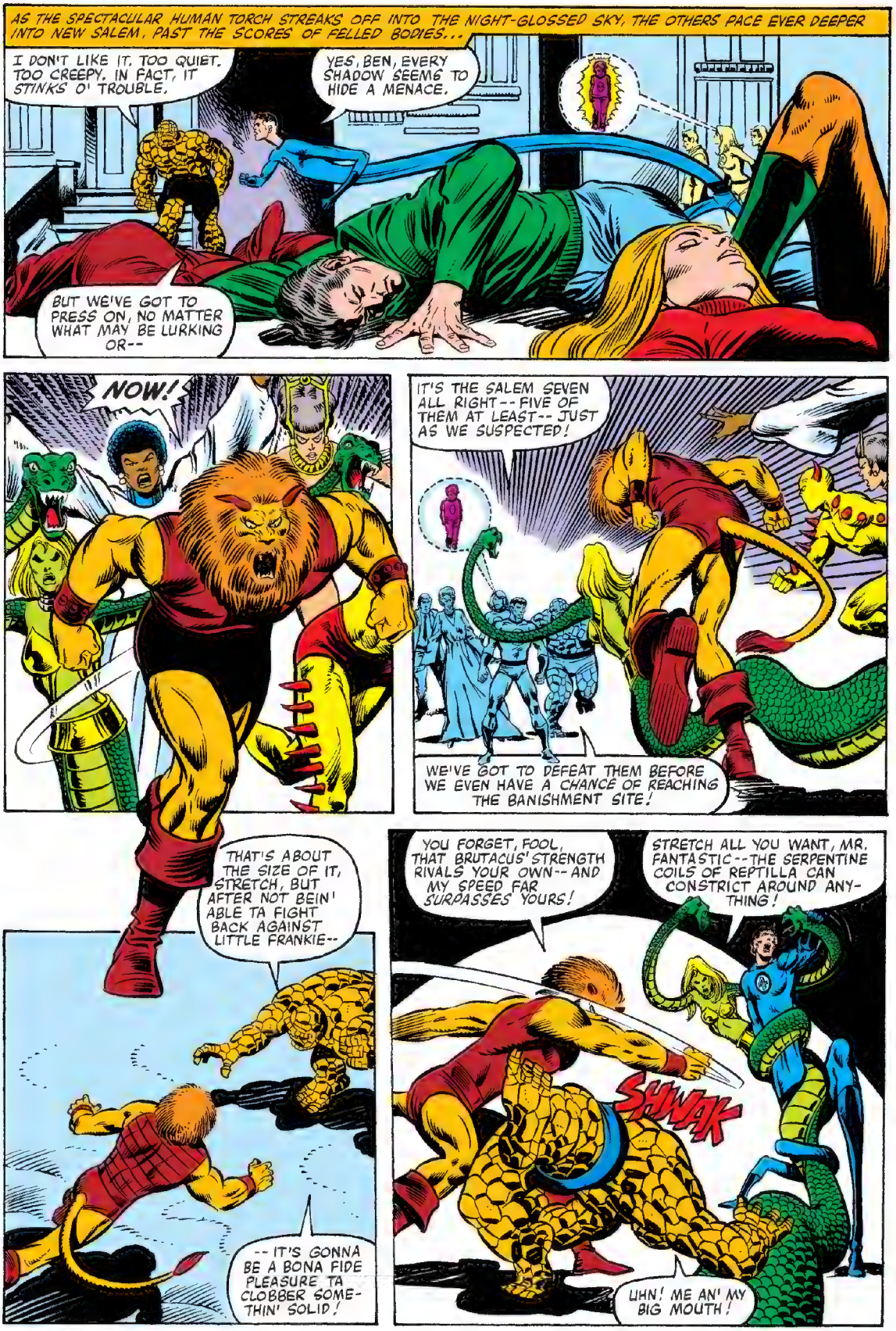
THE THREE PROBES RETRACT, AND--
THE SALEM SEVEN--THEY'RE FREE! BUT HOW--?!


WHAM
HOW, FOOLS? ASK NICHOLAS SCRATCH--WHEN HE RETURNS IN GLORY TO PUNISH YOU FOR THE FOLLY OF YOUR WAYS!

LOOK AT ALL THE FOOLS OUT THERE. THE MASTER SAID TO STOP THEM FROM INTERFERING, BUT WE HAVE LITTLE TIME BEFORE THE FANTASTIC FOUR ARRIVE. HOW WILL WE--
LEAVE IT TO ME, VERTIGO. JUST FOLLOW MY LEAD.
LOOK! IT'S ONE OF THE SALEM SEVEN--HE'S FREE!
YES, FOOLS, FREE--AND WITH MY FULL POWER...
...POWER TO CREATE A VACUUM WHICH ABSORBS ALL THE AIR FROM THE ENTIRE TOWN!
ALL RIGHT, VERTIGO, NOW IT'S YOUR TURN.
CH-CHOKING--!
C-CAN'T... BREATHE...!
YES, VAKUME, I UNDERSTAND YOUR PLAN NOW--AND IT IS ONE OF ELEGANT SIMPLICITY. I SHOULD HAVE CONCEIVED IT MYSELF.
THE COMBINED EFFECTS OF YOUR OXYGEN DEPRIVATION AND MY ASSAULT ON THE EQUILIBRIUM CENTERS OF THEIR MINDS SHOULD RENDER THEM COMPLETELY HELPLESS.
IN SHORT, THEY DROP LIKE FLIES IN A VERTIGINOUS VACUUM.
ALL RIGHT, THEY'LL BE UNCONSCIOUS FOR HOURS, IF NOT DAYS. ALL THAT REMAINS IS TO LAY OUR TRAP FOR THE ACCURSED FANTASTIC FOUR.


SPEAKING OF WHOM...
Y'KNOW, THAT GABRIEL DUDE GIVES ME THE CREEPS, BEN-- THE WAY HE SHOWED UP OUT OF NOWHERE--HOW HE ALWAYS STICKS TO THE SHADOWS--AND HE HASN'T SAID A PEEP THE WHOLE TRIP...
YEAH, BUT AGGIE HARKNESS VOUCHED FOR HIM, AND HE WUZ ABLE TO CUT THROUGH FRANKLIN'S POSSESSION AND REACH SCRATCH INSIDE.
GUESS YOU'RE RIGHT, BEN-- JUST HUMAN NATURE TO BE SUSPICIOUS OF THE STRANGE AND DIFFERENT.
SPEAK FER YERSELF, HOTSHOT. MEBBE MY TEMPER GETS THE BETTER O' ME SOMETIMES--
--BUT I BEEN ON THE WRONG END O' THAT SUSPICION ENOUGH TIMES TA REALIZE YA DON'T JUDGE THE BOOK BY ITS COVER--EVEN IF IT DOES WEAR CHUNKY ORANGE SKIN OR A WEIRD EYEPATCH.
BUT IT'S TIME TA STOW THE PHILOSOPHIZIN' BEFORE I GET ALL CHOKED UP ON MY OWN INSPIRATIONAL WORDS--
--CUZ IN CASE YA AIN'T GUESSED, WE'RE HERE. 'COURSE THE JOINT'S INVISIBLE--BUT I DIDN'T PROMISE MIRACLES.
NOT INVISIBLE, BENJAMIN GRIMM, BUT MERELY ON AN ALTERNATE SIDEREAL PLANE...
GLAD YA CLEARED THAT UP, AGGIE, FOR A MINUTE THERE I THOUGHT WE COULDN'T SEE THE PLACE.
PATIENCE, MR. GRIMM--A SIMPLE INCANTATION WILL MAKE OUR POSITION TRULY CLEAR.
THAT WHICH IS CRAFTILY HIDDEN FROM VIEW, RETURN NOW! SHOW THYSELF ANEW!
AND, IN A TWINKLING, AGATHA HARKNESS IS STAGGERED BY THE SIGHT SHE HAS WROUGHT...
I...I FEARED THE WORST, BUT... BUT THIS--! ALL MY FELLOW ELDRITCH FOLK--SPRAWLED IN THE STREETS AS IF STRICKEN BY A PLAGUE!
YEAH, AN' I BET I CAN NAME THE VIRUS--IT'S CALLED SALEM SEVEN.
THE FOOL IS RIGHT, MOTHER! IT IS A PLAGUE OF MY MAKING--A PLAGUE OF EVIL WHICH SHALL SOON STRIKE DOWN THE FANTASTIC FOUR AND GABRIEL AS WELL!
NICHOLAS HAS RECLAIMED THE CHILD!

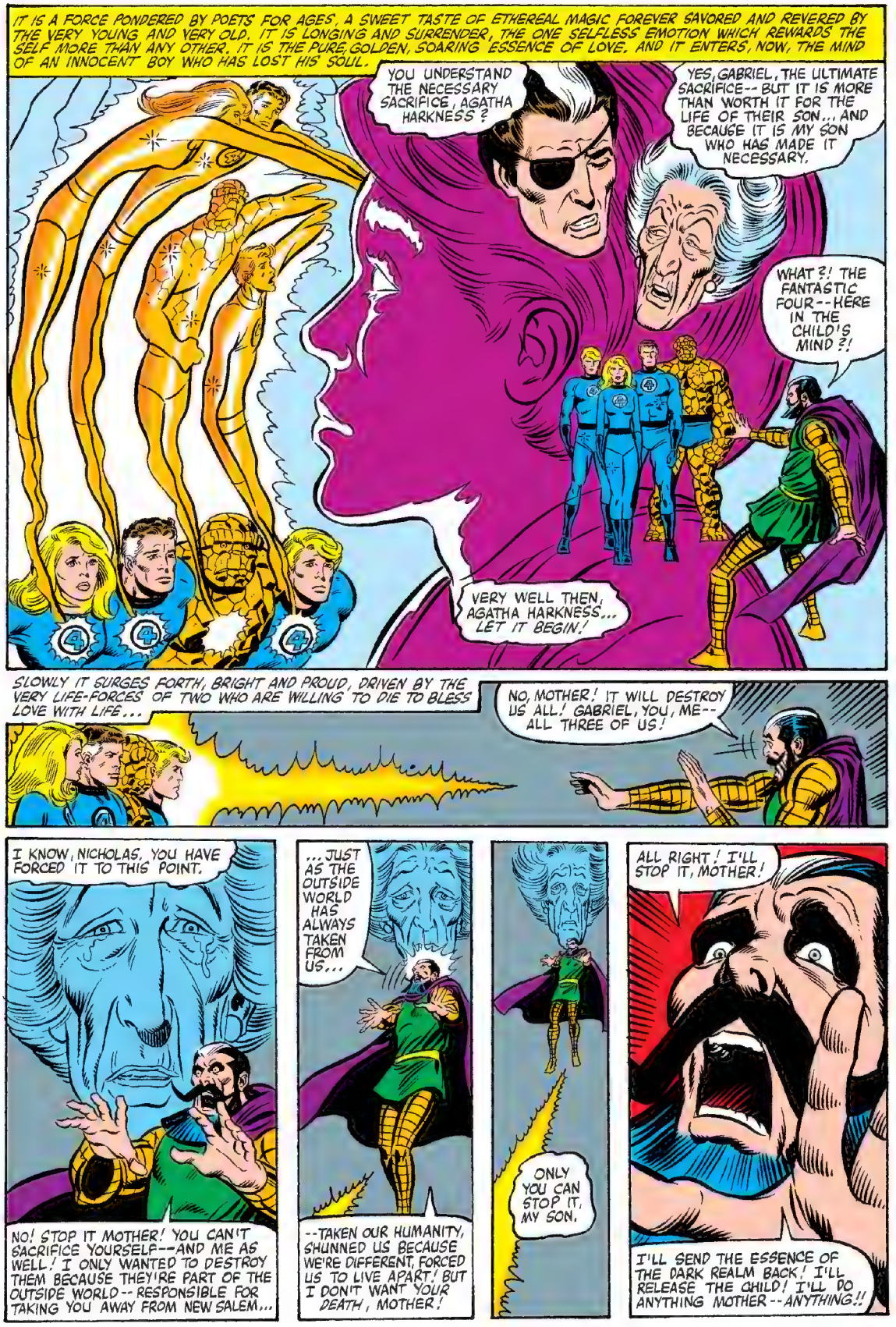
NO! NOT AGAIN--! MUST STRENGTHEN MY FORCE-BUBBLE--CONTAIN THE EVIL ENERGY INSIDE--BUT IT'S SO POWERFUL! DON'T KNOW IF I CAN--
SILENCE, DEMON! BEGONE! YOU HAVE CAUGHT ME IN A MOMENT OF WEAKNESS--
--BUT NOW YOU FEEL MY POWER ANEW! RETREAT TO THE CHILD'S SUBCONSCIOUS AND BOTHER US NO MORE!
THEN IT WAS YOU, GABRIEL--SUPPRESSING SCRATCH'S LIFE-FORCE WITHIN MY SON'S MIND THE WHOLE TIME--EVER SINCE WE LEFT WHISPER HILL.
YES, REED RICHARDS.
THE DEMON'S CONSTANT PRESENCE WOULD ONLY HAVE DEMORALIZED YOU AND YOUR WIFE--AT A TIME WHEN YOU NEEDED REST FOR THE COMING DEBACLE.
BUT IT REQUIRED GREAT EFFORT, CONSTANT CONCENTRATION--
--AND I WAS MOMENTARILY DISTRACTED BY THIS TOWN'S ABRUPT APPEARANCE...
NO WONDER HE WAS SO QUIET IN THE SHADOWS, BEN. HE WAS WRESTLING WITH THAT DEMON SCRATCH THE WHOLE TRIP!
THE BOOK'S BETTER'N ITS COVER, EH KID?--WITH A TWIST ENDIN' TA BOOT.
YOU'RE A STRANGE MAN, GABRIEL, BUT A MORE COMPASSIONATE ONE THAN I SUSPECTED.
THANK YOU... THANK YOU WITH ALL MY HEART.
AWRIGHT, STRETCHO, ENOUGH TUGGIN' AT THE HEARTSTRINGS. IF WE'RE GONNA CONFRONT A BLASTED TRAP, LET'S CONFRONT THE BLASTED THING!
YOU'RE RIGHT, BEN. WE'LL ENTER THE TOWN AFOOT.
JOHNNY--YOU FLY A RECON CHECK AND REPORT BACK TO US!
GOTCHA, REED.
FLAME ON!

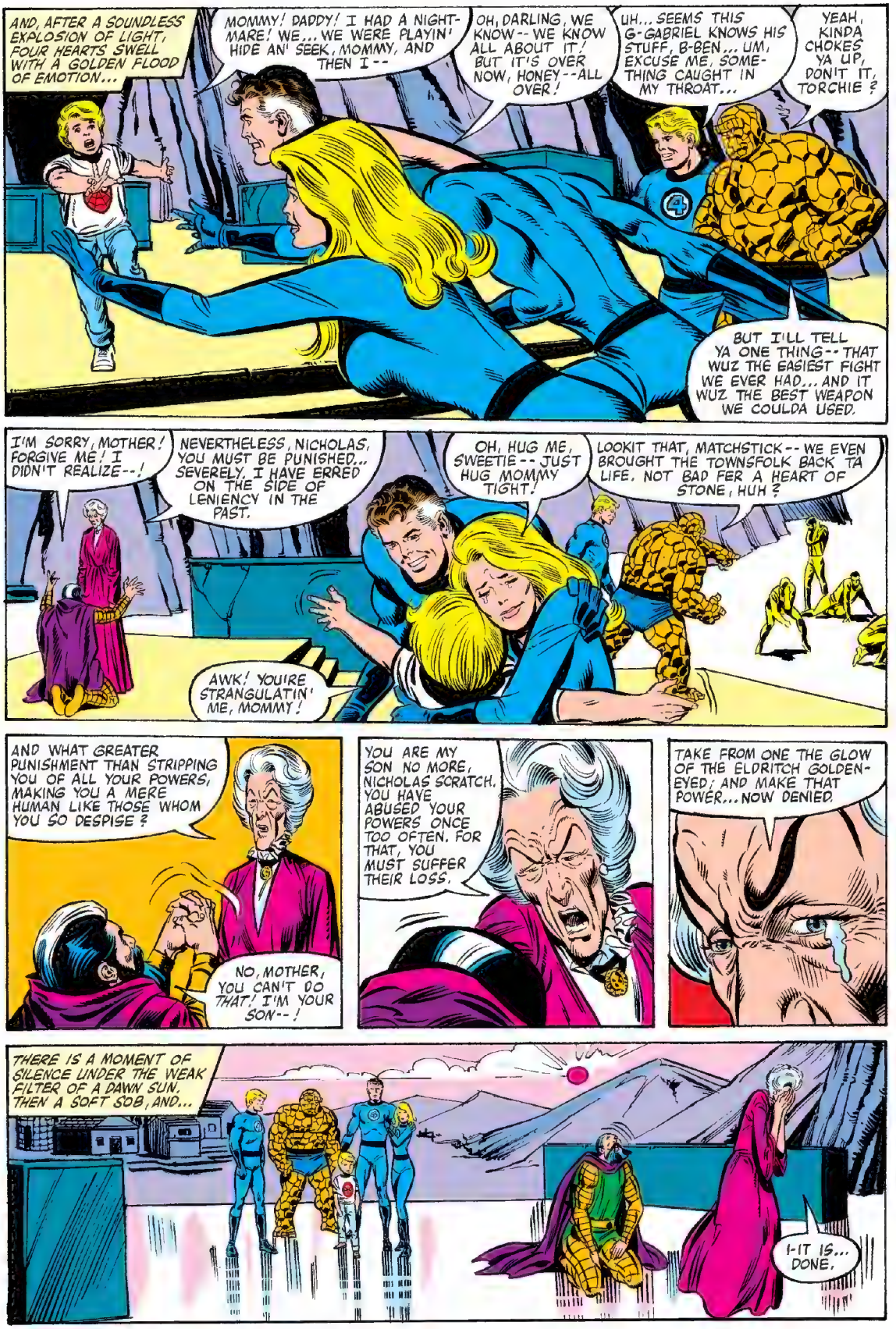

AS THE SPECTACULAR HUMAN TORCH STREAKS OFF INTO THE NIGHT-GLOSSED SKY, THE OTHERS PACE EVER DEEPER INTO NEW SALEM, PAST THE SCORES OF FELLED BODIES...
I DON'T LIKE IT. TOO QUIET. TOO CREEPY. IN FACT, IT STINKS O' TROUBLE.
YES, BEN, EVERY SHADOW SEEMS TO HIDE A MENACE.
BUT WE'VE GOT TO PRESS ON, NO MATTER WHAT MAY BE LURKING OR--
NOW!
IT'S THE SALEM SEVEN ALL RIGHT--FIVE OF THEM AT LEAST--JUST AS WE SUSPECTED!
WE'VE GOT TO DEFEAT THEM BEFORE WE EVEN HAVE A CHANCE OF REACHING THE BANISHMENT SITE!
THAT'S ABOUT THE SIZE OF IT, STRETCH, BUT AFTER NOT BEIN' ABLE TA FIGHT BACK AGAINST LITTLE FRANKIE--
--IT'S GONNA BE A BONA FIDE PLEASURE TA CLOBBER SOMETHIN' SOLID!
YOU FORGET, FOOL, THAT BRUTACUS' STRENGTH RIVALS YOUR OWN--AND MY SPEED FAR SURPASSES YOURS!
STRETCH ALL YOU WANT, MR. FANTASTIC--THE SERPENTINE COILS OF REPTILLA CAN CONSTRICT AROUND ANYTHING!
SHWAK
UHN! ME AN' MY BIG MOUTH!

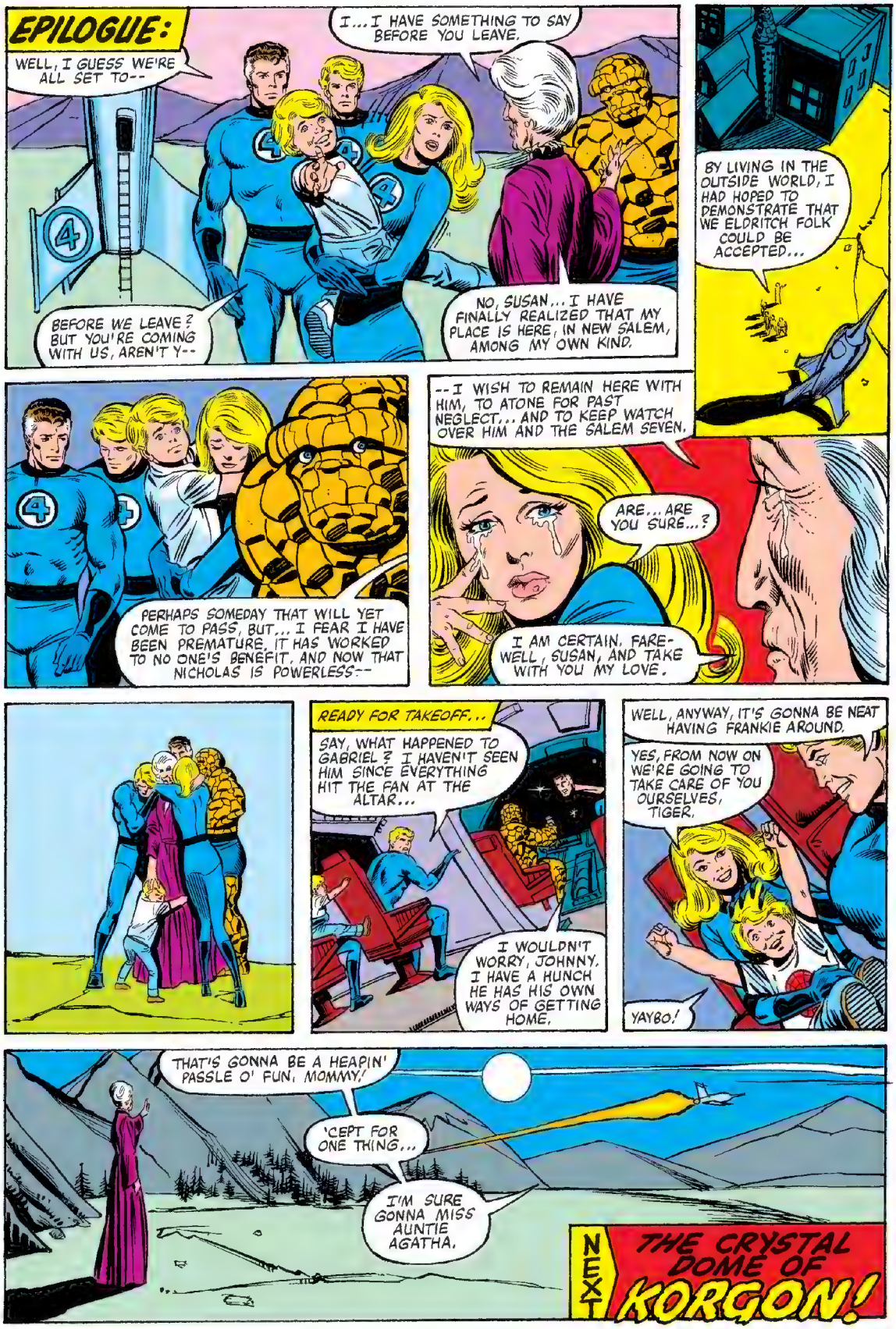
AND WHILE MR. FANTASTIC AND THE THING EXPERIENCE DEFINITE SETBACKS, THE HUMAN TORCH COMPLETES HIS FIRST CIRCUIT OF THE EERIE TOWN WITH A SIMILAR, IF LESS BRUTAL, DISAPPOINTMENT...
CAN'T SPOT A THING, NOT EVEN--
WAIT A MINUTE--!
THAT BUILDING COLLAPSING BACK THERE!
THAT'S BEN'S MARK IF EVER I SAW IT!
GOTTA GET BACK THERE FAST-- THEY MAY NEED ME!
NOW, HYDRON!
FOOSH
WHAT THE--?!
WATER-- TOOK ME BY SURPRISE! IT'S DOUSING HALF MY FLAME!
THE TORCH PLUMMETS INTO A CLUMSY SPIRAL...
ONLY CHANCE IS TO TOSS SOME FIREBALLS AT 'EM BEFORE--
YOUR TURN, VAKUME!
YES... FOR WITHOUT OXYGEN, HIS FLAME--
-- DIES.
WHUMP
NOW, HYDRON, WHILE HE IS STILL STUNNED, YOU MAY APPLY THE COUP DE GRACE.

SOAK HIM THOROUGHLY!
A GOOD PLAN, VAKUME. YOU SEEM TO EXCEL AS PART OF A TEAM.
AS WE ALL SHOULD. EGO GAINS NOTHING.
ALL THAT MATTERS IS FULFILLMENT OF THE MASTER'S ULTIMATE GOAL.
AND, BACK AT THE MAIN EVENT...
KINDA FOOLED YA WITH THE COLLAPSING ROOF TRICK, HUH, BRUTIE? JUST REMEMBER ONE THING--NO MATTER HOW FAST YA ARE, NOBODY EVER PUTS BASHFUL BENJIE OUT FOR THE COUNT!
BROK
HEAD SPINNING... GROUND TILTING... BUT IT'S ALL A TRICK... CAUSED BY VERTIGO... GOT TO REACH HER... MAKE HER STOP BEFORE...
BEFORE WHAT, MR. FANTASTIC?
BEFORE GAZELLE CAN AID HER SISTER? BEFORE YOU FALL BACK IN HELPLESS DEFEAT?
WAKT
AH, BUT IT IS ALREADY TOO LATE TO PREVENT SUCH THINGS!
I'VE GOT THE CHILD, THORNN--BUT THE INVISIBLE GIRL IS TOO STRONG, TOO STUBBORN! WE NEED THE MASTER'S AID!
AND SINCE THE MASTER SAID HE HAD FELT THE POWER OF THIS GABRIEL, REPTILLA, LET US SEE WHAT HAPPENS WHEN MY THORNS ELIMINATE HIM AND THE OTHER!
AND, WITH GABRIEL AND AGATHA HARKNESS UNCONSCIOUS, NICHOLAS SCRATCH EXPLODES IN HELLISH TRIUMPH, SHREDDING SUE'S FORCE-BUBBLE...
NO--! UHNNN...
THE FEEDBACK PUMMELS HER MIND, BURNS HER EYES, AND DROPS HER COLD.
HALT--OR YOUR CHILD DIES!
CLEARLY, THERE IS NO CHOICE.
TO THE BANISHMENT SITE! BRING THE PRISONERS!

LATER, THE FALLEN FOUR REVIVE...
...AND ALL SIX WOULD-BE SAVIORS, NUMB, IN SHOCK, LISTEN AS FRANKLIN SPEAKS FROM THE SOUL OF SCRATCH...
NOW SHALL I USE THE CHILD'S LATENT POWERS TO REVERSE THE SPELL OF BANISHMENT--AND TO LET THE DARK REALM FLOOD OVER INTO EARTH!
WH-WHAT DOES HE MEAN, REED?
I DON'T KNOW, BUT--
YES! THE LANDSCAPE--THE SKY--THE VERY AIR AROUND US--IT'S ALL BEING ALTERED! EARTH IS BEING CONSUMED BY THE DARK REALM!
FRANKLIN... PLEASE... I LOVE YOU, FRANKLIN... I LOVE YOU!
FORCED TO WITNESS THE TERRIBLE SIGHT, BEN GRIMM'S NORMALLY GRUFF VOICE RISES PLAINTIVELY FROM THE VERY DEPTHS OF DESPAIR...
AGGIE! CAN'T YA DO NOTHIN' TA STOP IT?
SADLY, NO, BENJAMIN GRIMM, EVEN I AM POWERLESS AGAINST FRANKLIN'S FULL POWERS UNLEASHED IN THIS FASHION. IF ANYTHING CAN BE DONE, THEN IT MUST BE DONE BY GABRIEL...
THEN WHAT'RE YA WAITIN' FOR--?! I DEFENDED YOU! IT'S TIME FOR THE PAYOFF--DO SOMETHIN'! THAT'S LITTLE FRANKIE UP THERE!
MUST HOLD ON--CONCENTRATE...
...WAIT FOR THE PRECISE MOMENT WHEN THE CHILD'S MIND IS COMPLETELY OPENED. I CAN FEEL IT BUILDING TO A CRITICAL PEAK...
NOW! AGATHA HARKNESS--YOU MUST AID ME! WE MUST TAKE THE LOVE OF THE OTHER FOUR AND FORGE IT INTO A WEAPON--ENTERING THE CHILD'S MIND TO USE THAT WEAPON AGAINST SCRATCH!
VERY WELL, GABRIEL--I AM WITH YOU!
WH-WHAT'S HAPPENING TO US? WE'RE BEING SURROUNDED BY SOME KIND OF GOLDEN GLOW--!
FEEL SOMETHIN' BEIN' WRENCHED DEEP INSIDE... LIKE... LIKE SOMETHIN'S BEIN' RIPPED RIGHT OUTTA MY HEART--


IT IS A FORCE PONDERED BY POETS FOR AGES, A SWEET TASTE OF ETHEREAL MAGIC FOREVER SAVORED AND REVERED BY THE VERY YOUNG AND VERY OLD. IT IS LONGING AND SURRENDER, THE ONE SELFLESS EMOTION WHICH REWARDS THE SELF MORE THAN ANY OTHER. IT IS THE PURE, GOLDEN, SOARING ESSENCE OF LOVE. AND IT ENTERS, NOW, THE MIND OF AN INNOCENT BOY WHO HAS LOST HIS SOUL.
YOU UNDERSTAND THE NECESSARY SACRIFICE, AGATHA HARKNESS?
YES, GABRIEL, THE ULTIMATE SACRIFICE--BUT IT IS MORE THAN WORTH IT FOR THE LIFE OF THEIR SON... AND BECAUSE IT IS MY SON WHO HAS MADE IT NECESSARY.
WHAT?! THE FANTASTIC FOUR--HERE IN THE CHILD'S MIND?!
VERY WELL THEN, AGATHA HARKNESS... LET IT BEGIN!
SLOWLY IT SURGES FORTH, BRIGHT AND PROUD, DRIVEN BY THE VERY LIFE-FORCES OF TWO WHO ARE WILLING TO DIE TO BLESS LOVE WITH LIFE...
NO, MOTHER! IT WILL DESTROY US ALL! GABRIEL, YOU, ME--ALL THREE OF US!
I KNOW, NICHOLAS, YOU HAVE FORCED IT TO THIS POINT.
NO! STOP IT MOTHER! YOU CAN'T SACRIFICE YOURSELF--AND ME AS WELL! I ONLY WANTED TO DESTROY THEM BECAUSE THEY'RE PART OF THE OUTSIDE WORLD--RESPONSIBLE FOR TAKING YOU AWAY FROM NEW SALEM...
...JUST AS THE OUTSIDE WORLD HAS ALWAYS TAKEN FROM US...
--TAKEN OUR HUMANITY, SHUNNED US BECAUSE WE'RE DIFFERENT, FORCED US TO LIVE APART! BUT I DON'T WANT YOUR DEATH, MOTHER!
ONLY YOU CAN STOP IT, MY SON.
ALL RIGHT! I'LL STOP IT, MOTHER!
I'LL SEND THE ESSENCE OF THE DARK REALM BACK! I'LL RELEASE THE CHILD! I'LL DO ANYTHING MOTHER--ANYTHING!!


AND, AFTER A SOUNDLESS EXPLOSION OF LIGHT, FOUR HEARTS SWELL WITH A GOLDEN FLOOD OF EMOTION...
MOMMY! DADDY! I HAD A NIGHTMARE! WE... WE WERE PLAYIN' HIDE AN' SEEK, MOMMY, AND THEN I--
OH, DARLING, WE KNOW-- WE KNOW ALL ABOUT IT, BUT IT'S OVER NOW, HONEY--ALL OVER!
UH... SEEMS THIS G-GABRIEL KNOWS HIS STUFF, B-BEN... UM, EXCUSE ME, SOMETHING CAUGHT IN MY THROAT...
YEAH, KINDA CHOKES YA UP, DON'T IT, TORCHIE?
BUT I'LL TELL YA ONE THING-- THAT WUZ THE EASIEST FIGHT WE EVER HAD... AND IT WUZ THE BEST WEAPON WE COULDA USED.
I'M SORRY, MOTHER! FORGIVE ME! I DIDN'T REALIZE--!
NEVERTHELESS, NICHOLAS, YOU MUST BE PUNISHED... SEVERELY, I HAVE ERRED ON THE SIDE OF LENIENCY IN THE PAST.
OH, HUG ME, SWEETIE-- JUST HUG MOMMY TIGHT!
LOOKIT THAT, MATCHSTICK-- WE EVEN BROUGHT THE TOWNSFOLK BACK TA LIFE. NOT BAD FER A HEART OF STONE, HUH?
AWK! YOU'RE STRANGULATIN' ME, MOMMY!
AND WHAT GREATER PUNISHMENT THAN STRIPPING YOU OF ALL YOUR POWERS, MAKING YOU A MERE HUMAN LIKE THOSE WHOM YOU SO DESPISE?
NO, MOTHER, YOU CAN'T DO THAT! I'M YOUR SON--!
YOU ARE MY SON NO MORE, NICHOLAS SCRATCH. YOU HAVE ABUSED YOUR POWERS ONCE TOO OFTEN. FOR THAT, YOU MUST SUFFER THEIR LOSS.
TAKE FROM ONE THE GLOW OF THE ELDRITCH GOLDEN-EYED; AND MAKE THAT POWER... NOW DENIED.
THERE IS A MOMENT OF SILENCE UNDER THE WEAK FILTER OF A DAWN SUN. THEN A SOFT SOB, AND...
I-IT IS... DONE.


EPILOGUE:
WELL, I GUESS WE'RE ALL SET TO--
I...I HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY BEFORE YOU LEAVE.
BEFORE WE LEAVE? BUT YOU'RE COMING WITH US, AREN'T Y--
NO, SUSAN...I HAVE FINALLY REALIZED THAT MY PLACE IS HERE, IN NEW SALEM, AMONG MY OWN KIND.
BY LIVING IN THE OUTSIDE WORLD, I HAD HOPED TO DEMONSTRATE THAT WE ELDRITCH FOLK COULD BE ACCEPTED...
PERHAPS SOMEDAY THAT WILL YET COME TO PASS, BUT...I FEAR I HAVE BEEN PREMATURE. IT HAS WORKED TO NO ONE'S BENEFIT. AND NOW THAT NICHOLAS IS POWERLESS--
--I WISH TO REMAIN HERE WITH HIM, TO ATONE FOR PAST NEGLECT... AND TO KEEP WATCH OVER HIM AND THE SALEM SEVEN.
ARE...ARE YOU SURE...?
I AM CERTAIN. FAREWELL, SUSAN, AND TAKE WITH YOU MY LOVE.
READY FOR TAKEOFF...
SAY, WHAT HAPPENED TO GABRIEL? I HAVEN'T SEEN HIM SINCE EVERYTHING HIT THE FAN AT THE ALTAR...
I WOULDN'T WORRY, JOHNNY. I HAVE A HUNCH HE HAS HIS OWN WAYS OF GETTING HOME.
WELL, ANYWAY, IT'S GONNA BE NEAT HAVING FRANKIE AROUND.
YES, FROM NOW ON WE'RE GOING TO TAKE CARE OF YOU OURSELVES, TIGER.
YAYBO!
THAT'S GONNA BE A HEAPIN' PASSLE O' FUN, MOMMY!
'CEPT FOR ONE THING...
I'M SURE GONNA MISS AUNTIE AGATHA.
NEXT
THE CRYSTAL DOME OF KORGON!

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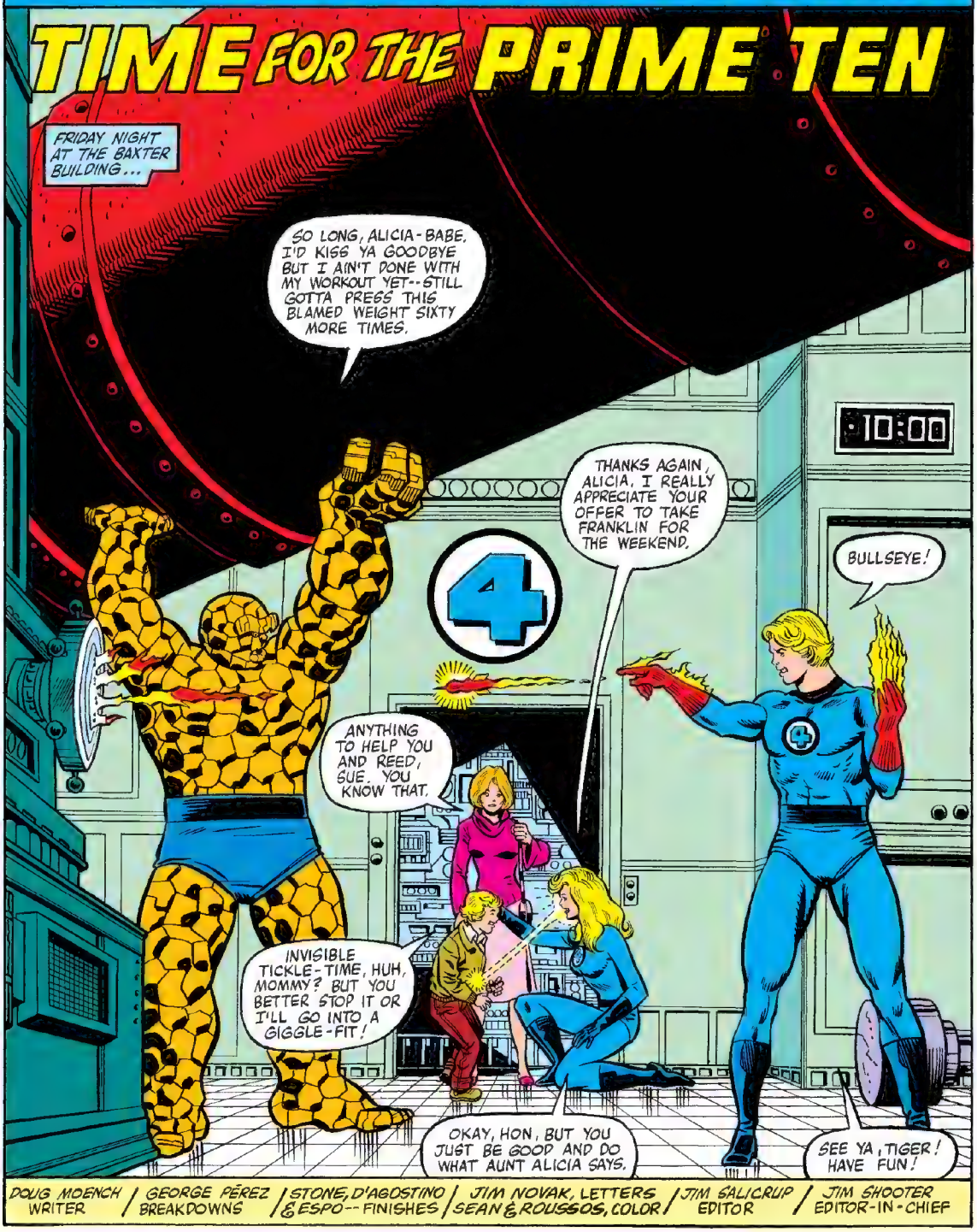
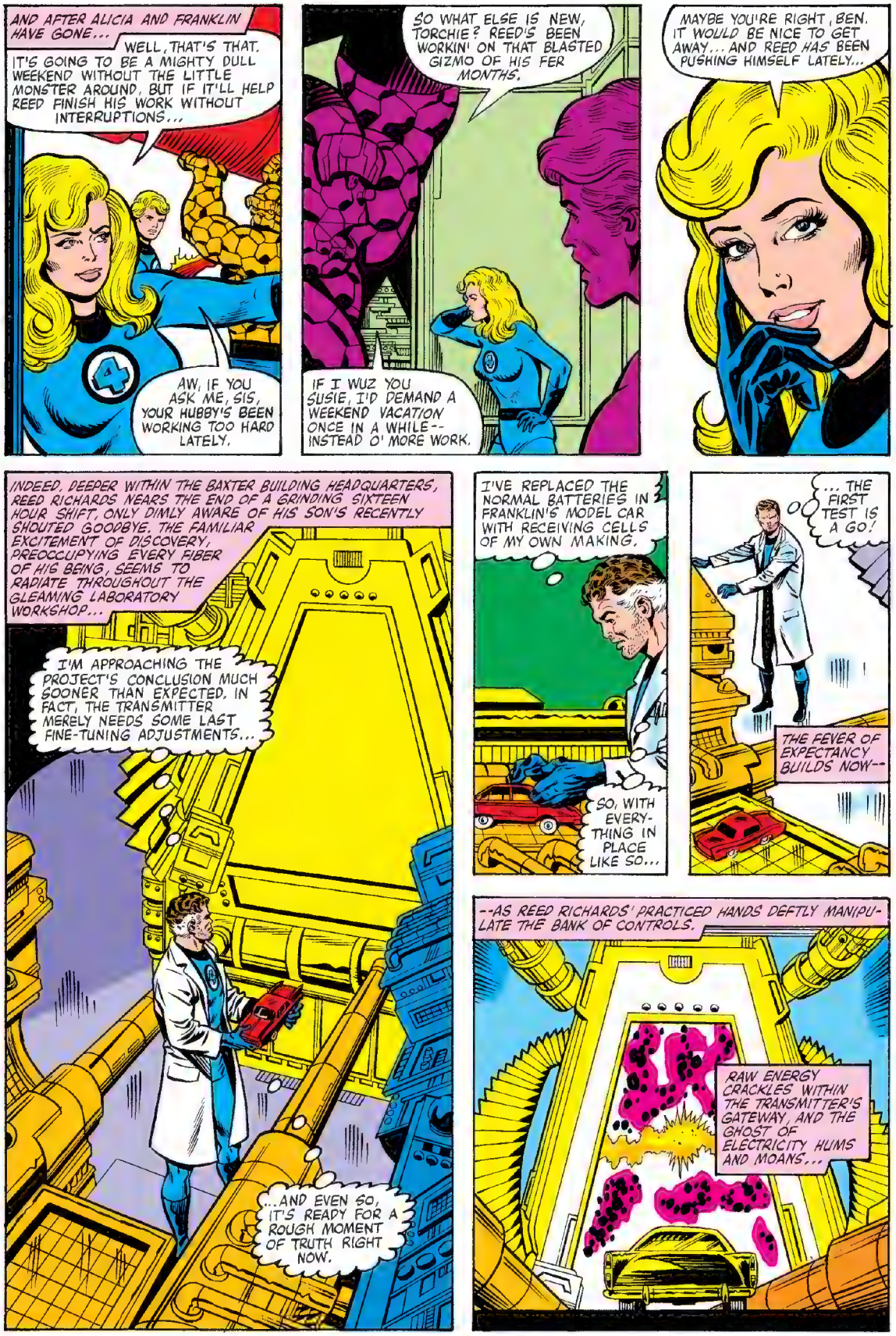
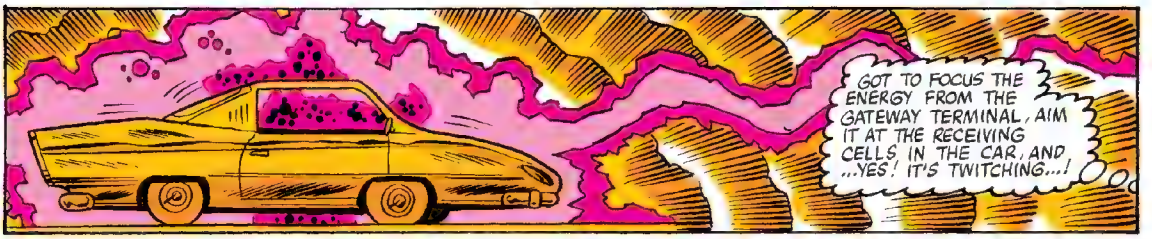
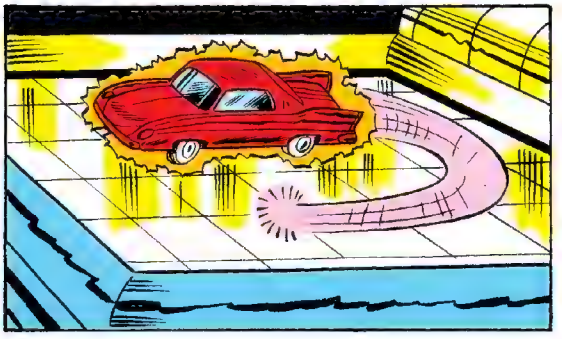

TIME FOR THE PRIME TEN
FRIDAY NIGHT AT THE BAXTER BUILDING...
SO LONG, ALICIA-BABE, I'D KISS YA GOODBYE BUT I AIN'T DONE WITH MY WORKOUT YET--STILL GOTTA PRESS THIS BLAMED WEIGHT SIXTY MORE TIMES.
10:00
THANKS AGAIN, ALICIA. I REALLY APPRECIATE YOUR OFFER TO TAKE FRANKLIN FOR THE WEEKEND.
BULLSEYE!
ANYTHING TO HELP YOU AND REED, SUE. YOU KNOW THAT.
INVISIBLE TICKLE-TIME, HUH, MOMMY? BUT YOU BETTER STOP IT OR I'LL GO INTO A GIGGLE-FIT!
OKAY, HON, BUT YOU JUST BE GOOD AND DO WHAT AUNT ALICIA SAYS.
SEE YA, TIGER! HAVE FUN!

DOUG MOENCH WRITER / GEORGE PÉREZ BREAKDOWNS / STONE, D'AGOSTINO & ESPO--FINISHES / JIM NOVAK, LETTERS / SEAN & ROUSSOS, COLOR / JIM SALICRUP EDITOR / JIM SHOOTER EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

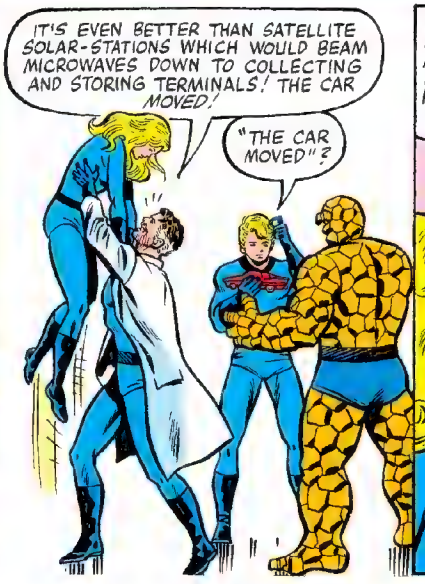

AND AFTER ALICIA AND FRANKLIN HAVE GONE...
WELL, THAT'S THAT. IT'S GOING TO BE A MIGHTY DULL WEEKEND WITHOUT THE LITTLE MONSTER AROUND, BUT IF IT'LL HELP REED FINISH HIS WORK WITHOUT INTERRUPTIONS...
AW, IF YOU ASK ME, SIS, YOUR HUBBY'S BEEN WORKING TOO HARD LATELY.
SO WHAT ELSE IS NEW, TORCHIE? REED'S BEEN WORKIN' ON THAT BLASTED GIZMO OF HIS FER MONTHS.
IF I WUZ YOU SUSIE, I'D DEMAND A WEEKEND VACATION ONCE IN A WHILE-- INSTEAD O' MORE WORK.
MAYBE YOU'RE RIGHT, BEN. IT WOULD BE NICE TO GET AWAY... AND REED HAS BEEN PUSHING HIMSELF LATELY...
INDEED, DEEPER WITHIN THE BAXTER BUILDING HEADQUARTERS, REED RICHARDS NEARS THE END OF A GRINDING SIXTEEN HOUR SHIFT, ONLY DIMLY AWARE OF HIS SON'S RECENTLY SHOUTED GOODBYE. THE FAMILIAR EXCITEMENT OF DISCOVERY, PREOCCUPYING EVERY FIBER OF HIS BEING, SEEMS TO RADIATE THROUGHOUT THE GLEAMING LABORATORY WORKSHOP...
I'M APPROACHING THE PROJECT'S CONCLUSION MUCH SOONER THAN EXPECTED, IN FACT, THE TRANSMITTER MERELY NEEDS SOME LAST FINE-TUNING ADJUSTMENTS...
...AND EVEN SO, IT'S READY FOR A ROUGH MOMENT OF TRUTH RIGHT NOW.
I'VE REPLACED THE NORMAL BATTERIES IN FRANKLIN'S MODEL CAR WITH RECEIVING CELLS OF MY OWN MAKING.
SO, WITH EVERY-THING IN PLACE LIKE SO...
... THE FIRST TEST IS A GO!
THE FEVER OF EXPECTANCY BUILDS NOW--
--AS REED RICHARDS' PRACTICED HANDS DEFTLY MANIPU-LATE THE BANK OF CONTROLS.
RAW ENERGY CRACKLES WITHIN THE TRANSMITTER'S GATEWAY, AND THE GHOST OF ELECTRICITY HUMS AND MOANS...

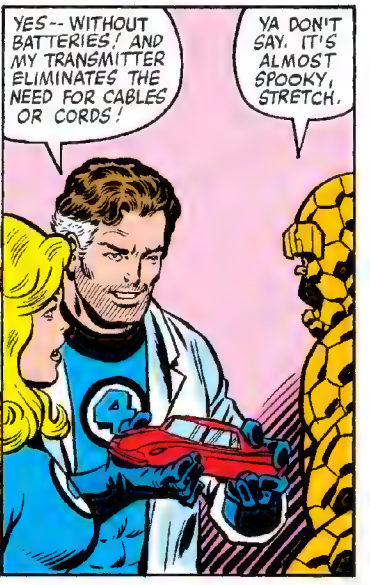

GOT TO FOCUS THE ENERGY FROM THE GATEWAY TERMINAL, AIM IT AT THE RECEIVING CELLS IN THE CAR, AND ...YES! IT'S TWITCHING...!



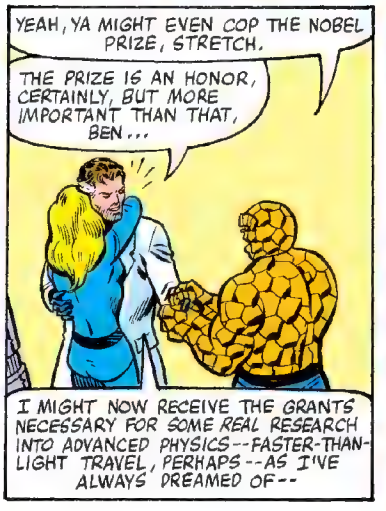
IT MOVED! THE BEAUTIFUL LITTLE HUNK OF PLASTIC MOVED!
I'VE DONE IT! IT WORKS!!

WHAT'S ALL THE BELLOWIN' ABOUT? WHAT WORKS?
MY ENERGY TRANSMITTER, BEN! IT WORKS!
DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT IT MEANS?! THE DIRECT TRANSMISSION OF ENERGY ACROSS VIRTUALLY ANY DISTANCE-- THROUGH THE SIMPLE MEDIUM OF AIR-- OR EVEN THROUGH A VACUUM!

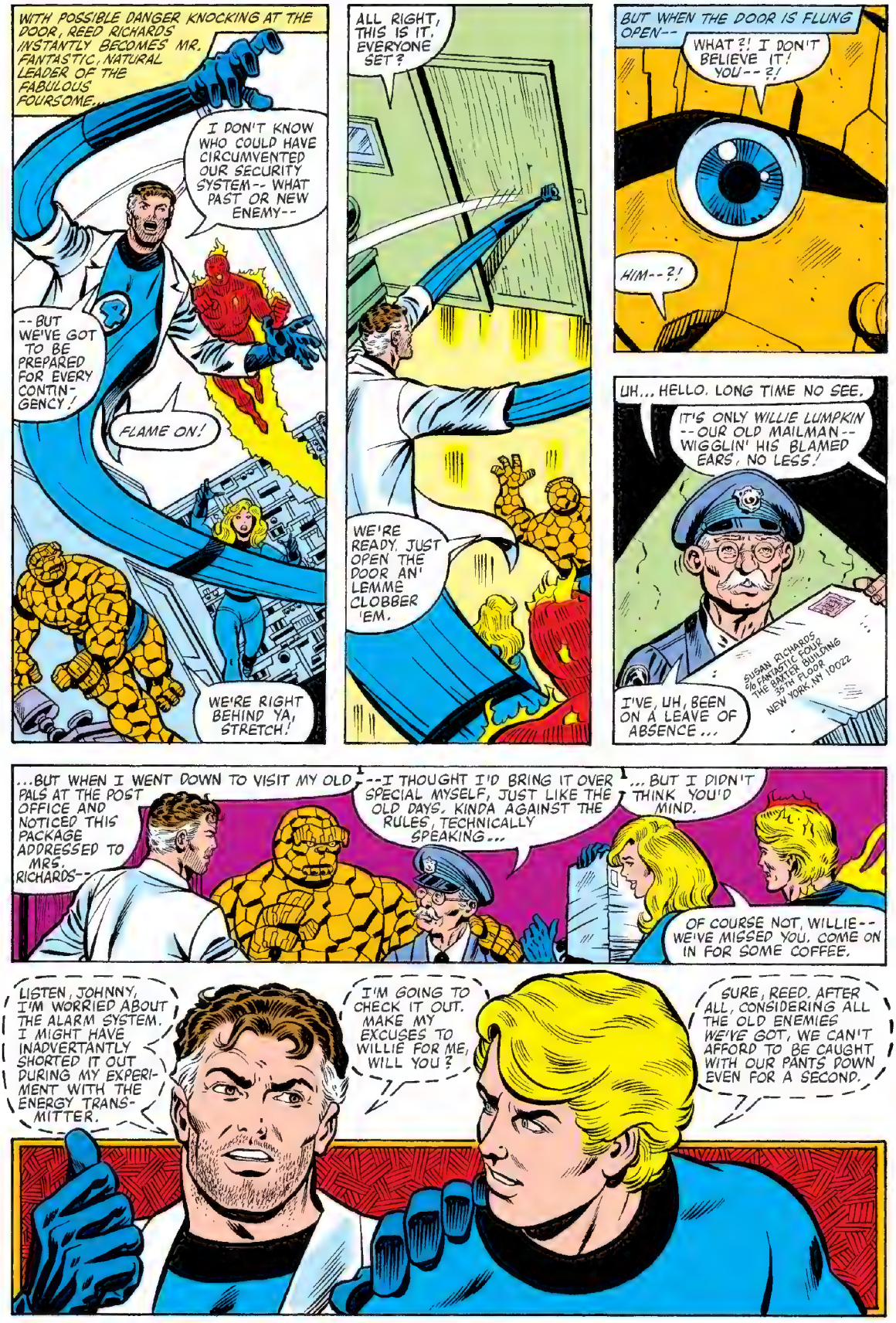

IT'S EVEN BETTER THAN SATELLITE SOLAR-STATIONS WHICH WOULD BEAM MICROWAVES DOWN TO COLLECTING AND STORING TERMINALS! THE CAR MOVED!
"THE CAR MOVED"?

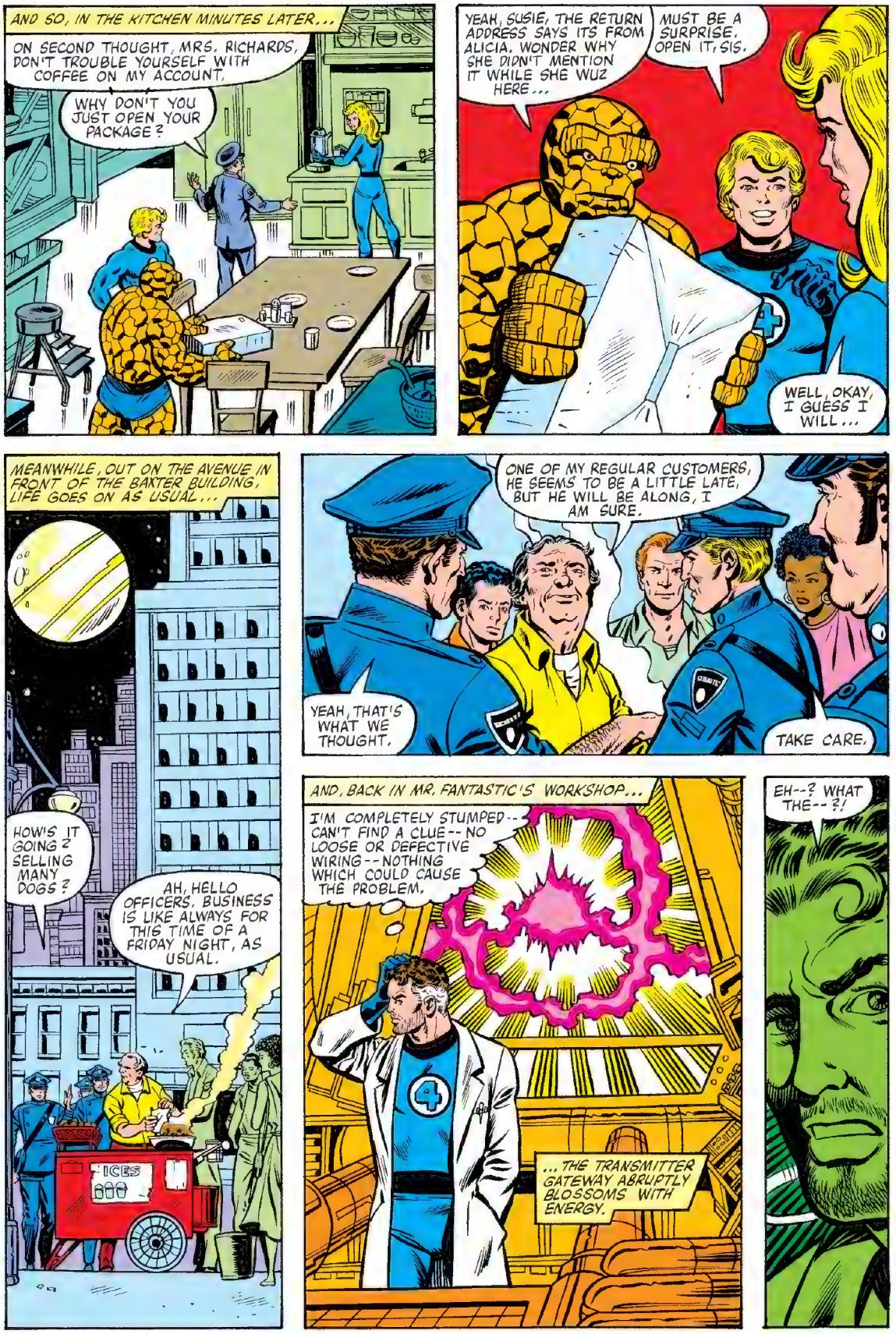

YES-- WITHOUT BATTERIES! AND MY TRANSMITTER ELIMINATES THE NEED FOR CABLES OR CORDS!
YA DON'T SAY. IT'S ALMOST SPOOKY, STRETCH.

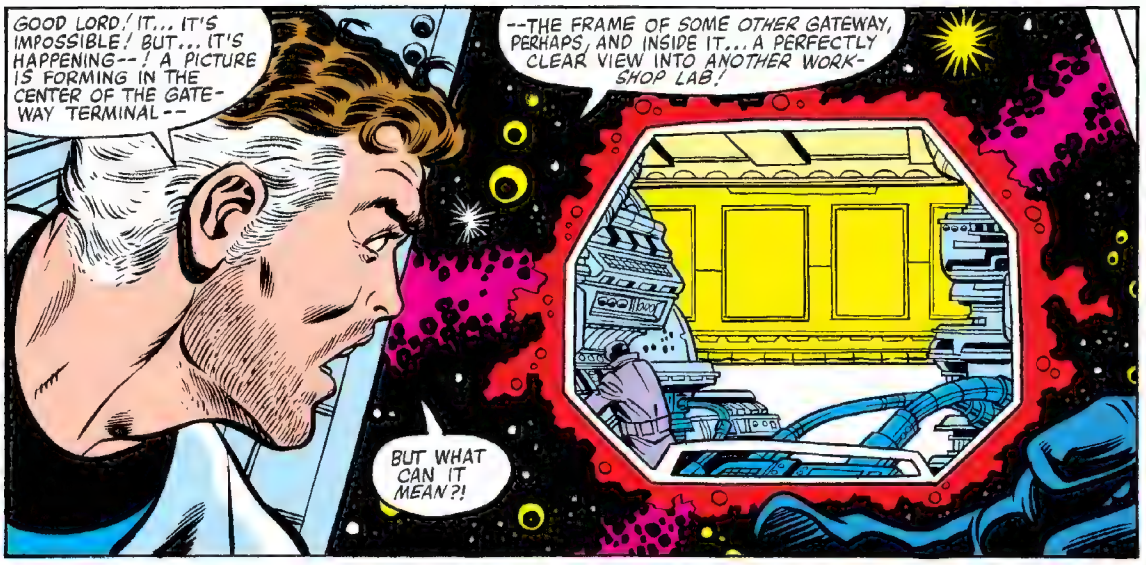
NOT AT ALL! IT'S A GODSEND FOR AN ENERGY-DEPLETED FUTURE!
IT... IT'S WONDERFUL, DARLING! I'M SO HAPPY FOR YOU-- SO PROUD OF WHAT YOU'VE DONE!

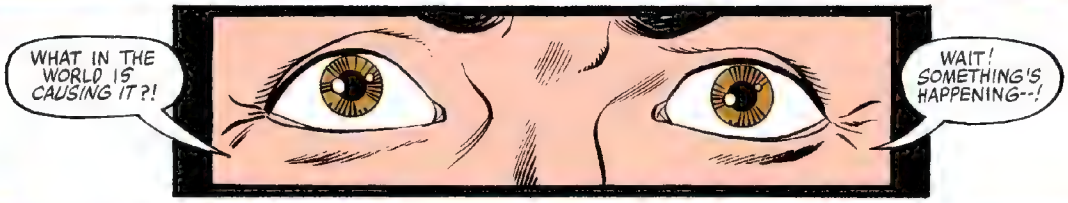

YEAH, YA MIGHT EVEN COP THE NOBEL PRIZE, STRETCH.
THE PRIZE IS AN HONOR, CERTAINLY, BUT MORE IMPORTANT THAN THAT, BEN...
I MIGHT NOW RECEIVE THE GRANTS NECESSARY FOR SOME REAL RESEARCH INTO ADVANCED PHYSICS--FASTER-THAN-LIGHT TRAVEL, PERHAPS--AS I'VE ALWAYS DREAMED OF--

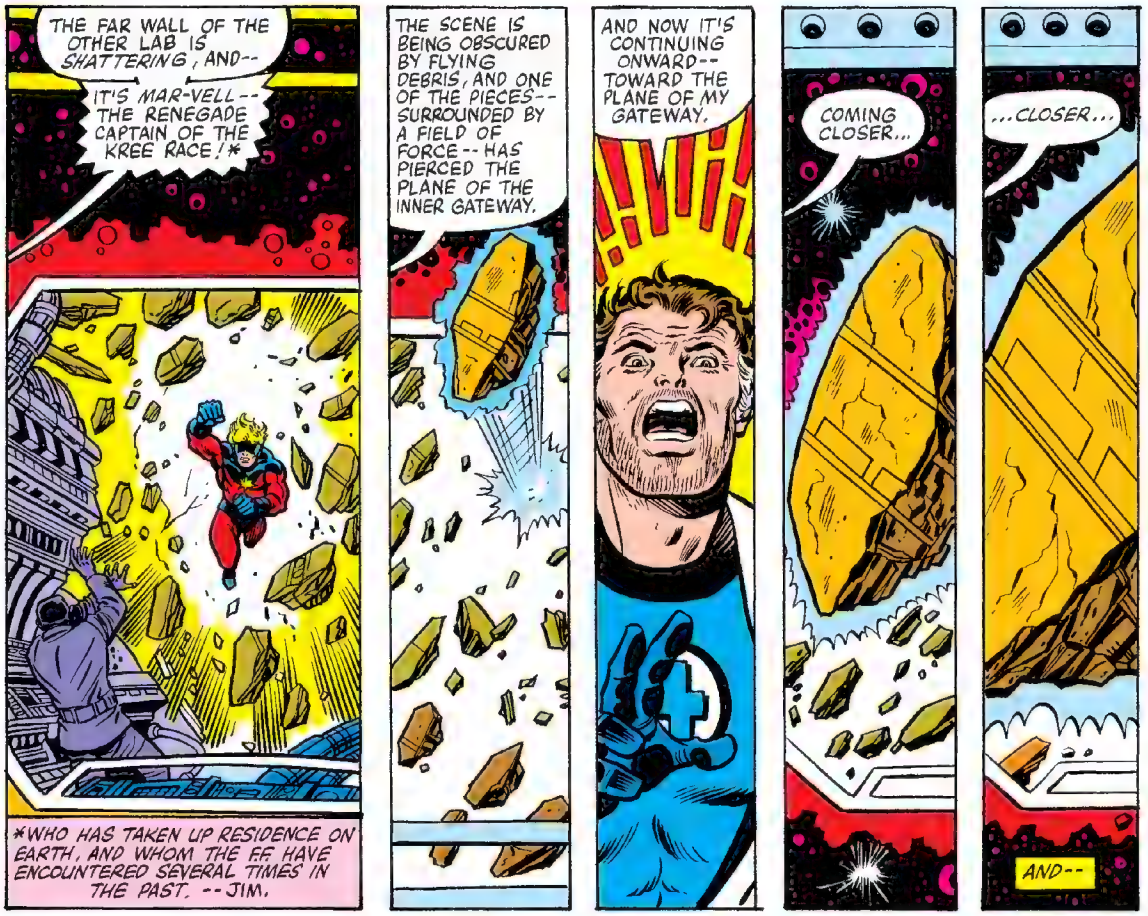
KLUNK
THAT CAME FROM THE FRONT DOOR!
YEAH-- BUT NONE O' THE ALARMS WENT OFF!

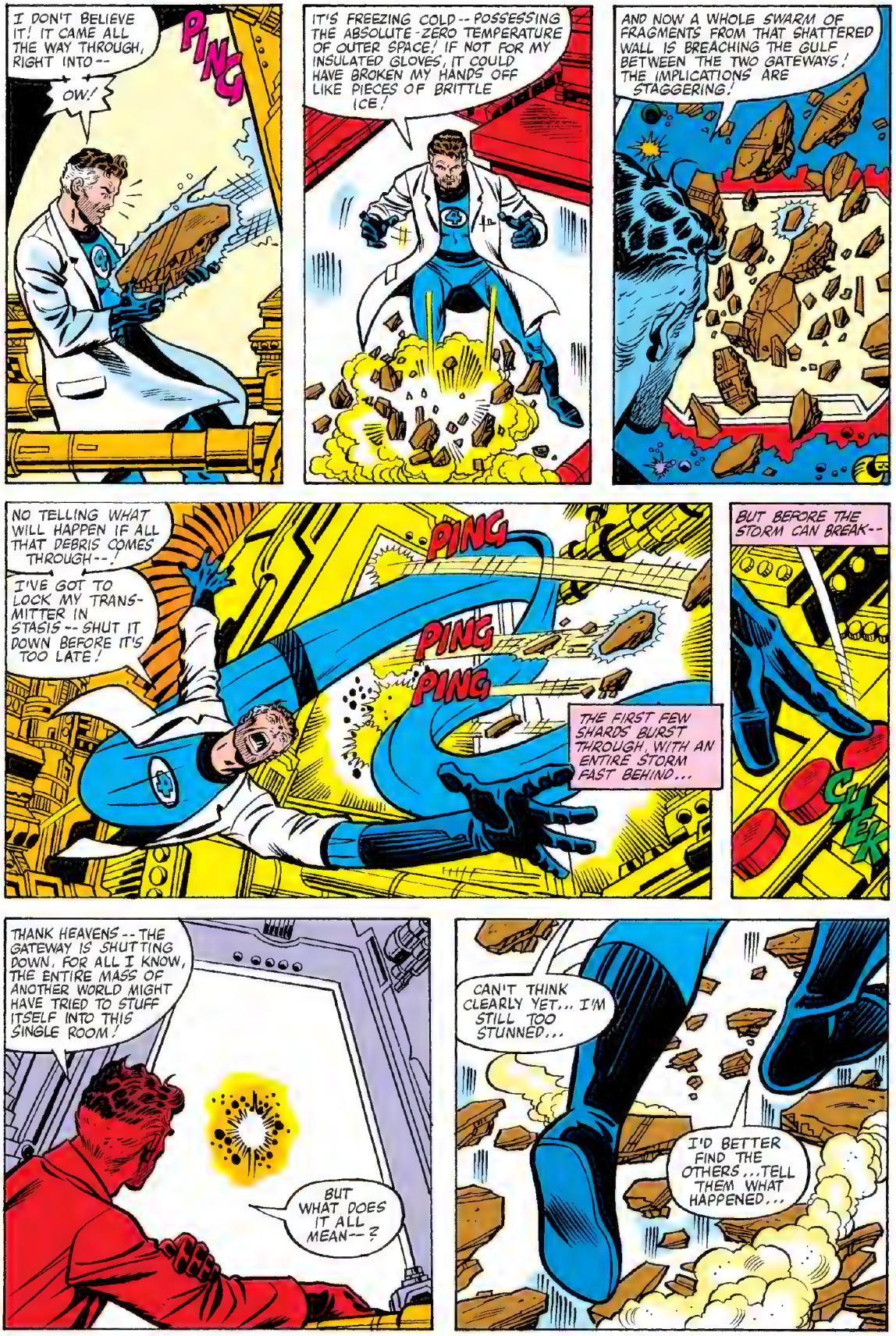

WITH POSSIBLE DANGER KNOCKING AT THE DOOR, REED RICHARDS INSTANTLY BECOMES MR. FANTASTIC, NATURAL LEADER OF THE FABULOUS FOURSOME...
I DON'T KNOW WHO COULD HAVE CIRCUMVENTED OUR SECURITY SYSTEM-- WHAT PAST OR NEW ENEMY--
--BUT WE'VE GOT TO BE PREPARED FOR EVERY CONTIN-GENCY!
FLAME ON!
WE'RE RIGHT BEHIND YA, STRETCH!
ALL RIGHT, THIS IS IT. EVERYONE SET?
WE'RE READY. JUST OPEN THE DOOR AN' LEMME CLOBBER 'EM.
BUT WHEN THE DOOR IS FLUNG OPEN--
WHAT?! I DON'T BELIEVE IT! YOU--?!
HIM--?!
UH... HELLO. LONG TIME NO SEE.
IT'S ONLY WILLIE LUMPKIN --OUR OLD MAILMAN-- WIGGLIN' HIS BLAMED EARS, NO LESS!
SUSAN RICHARDS C/O FANTASTIC FOUR THE BAXTER BUILDING 35TH FLOOR NEW YORK, NY 10022
I'VE, UH, BEEN ON A LEAVE OF ABSENCE...
...BUT WHEN I WENT DOWN TO VISIT MY OLD PALS AT THE POST OFFICE AND NOTICED THIS PACKAGE ADDRESSED TO MRS. RICHARDS--
--I THOUGHT I'D BRING IT OVER SPECIAL MYSELF, JUST LIKE THE OLD DAYS, KINDA AGAINST THE RULES, TECHNICALLY SPEAKING...
...BUT I DIDN'T THINK YOU'D MIND.
OF COURSE NOT, WILLIE-- WE'VE MISSED YOU. COME ON IN FOR SOME COFFEE.
LISTEN, JOHNNY, I'M WORRIED ABOUT THE ALARM SYSTEM. I MIGHT HAVE INADVERTANTLY SHORTED IT OUT DURING MY EXPERI-MENT WITH THE ENERGY TRANS-MITTER.
I'M GOING TO CHECK IT OUT. MAKE MY EXCUSES TO WILLIE FOR ME, WILL YOU?
SURE, REED. AFTER ALL, CONSIDERING ALL THE OLD ENEMIES WE'VE GOT, WE CAN'T AFFORD TO BE CAUGHT WITH OUR PANTS DOWN EVEN FOR A SECOND.

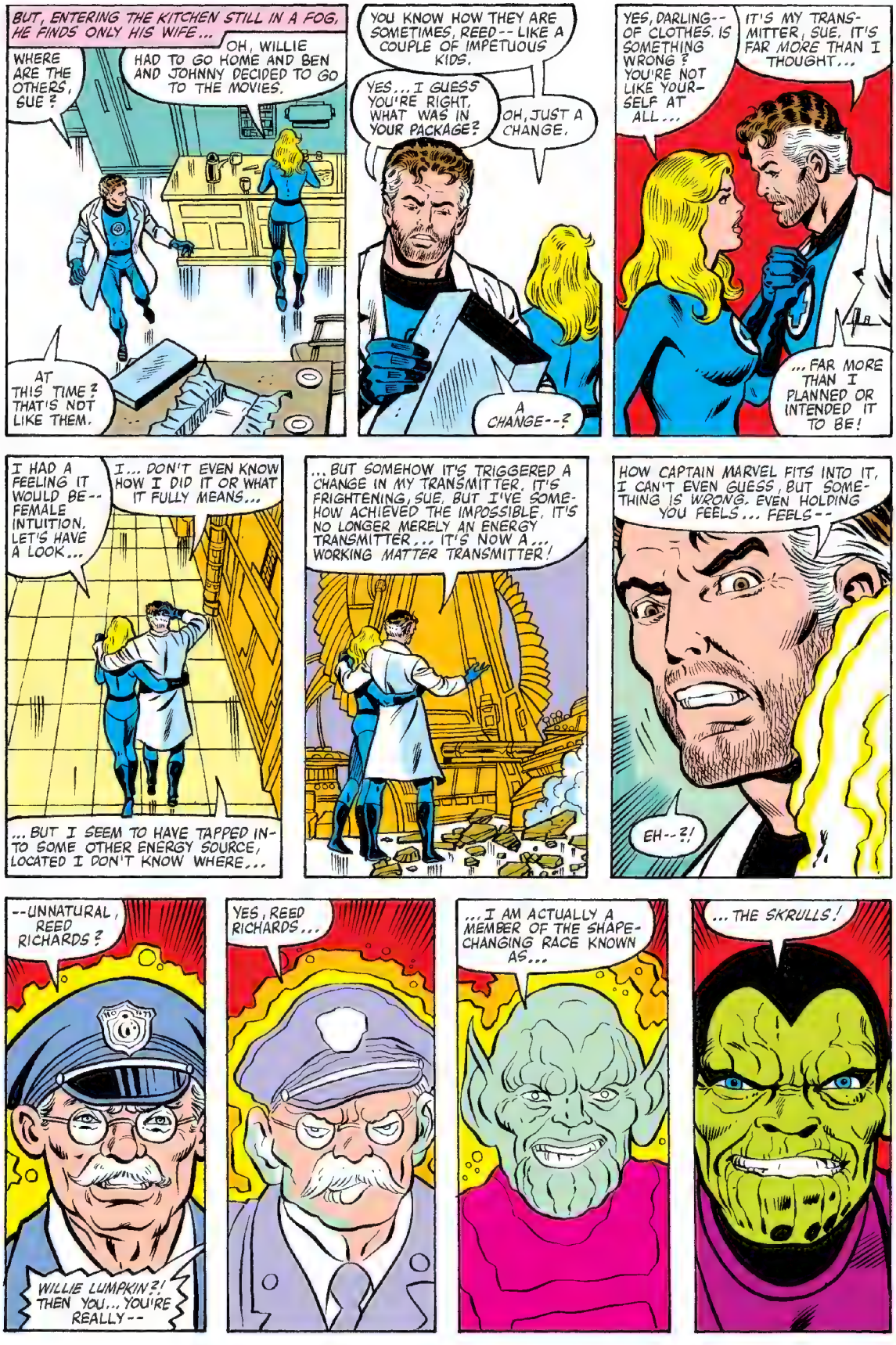

AND SO, IN THE KITCHEN MINUTES LATER...
ON SECOND THOUGHT, MRS. RICHARDS, DON'T TROUBLE YOURSELF WITH COFFEE ON MY ACCOUNT.
WHY DON'T YOU JUST OPEN YOUR PACKAGE?
YEAH, SUSIE, THE RETURN ADDRESS SAYS ITS FROM ALICIA. WONDER WHY SHE DIDN'T MENTION IT WHILE SHE WUZ HERE...
MUST BE A SURPRISE. OPEN IT, SIS.
WELL, OKAY, I GUESS I WILL...
MEANWHILE, OUT ON THE AVENUE IN FRONT OF THE BAXTER BUILDING, LIFE GOES ON AS USUAL...
HOW'S IT GOING? SELLING MANY DOGS?
AH, HELLO OFFICERS. BUSINESS IS LIKE ALWAYS FOR THIS TIME OF A FRIDAY NIGHT, AS USUAL.
ICES
ONE OF MY REGULAR CUSTOMERS, HE SEEMS TO BE A LITTLE LATE, BUT HE WILL BE ALONG, I AM SURE.
YEAH, THAT'S WHAT WE THOUGHT.
TAKE CARE.
AND, BACK IN MR. FANTASTIC'S WORKSHOP...
I'M COMPLETELY STUMPED-- CAN'T FIND A CLUE-- NO LOOSE OR DEFECTIVE WIRING-- NOTHING WHICH COULD CAUSE THE PROBLEM.
...THE TRANSMITTER GATEWAY ABRUPTLY BLOSSOMS WITH ENERGY.
EH--? WHAT THE--?!


GOOD LORD! IT... IT'S IMPOSSIBLE! BUT... IT'S HAPPENING--! A PICTURE IS FORMING IN THE CENTER OF THE GATE-WAY TERMINAL--
--THE FRAME OF SOME OTHER GATEWAY, PERHAPS, AND INSIDE IT... A PERFECTLY CLEAR VIEW INTO ANOTHER WORK-SHOP LAB!
BUT WHAT CAN IT MEAN?!


WHAT IN THE WORLD IS CAUSING IT?!
WAIT! SOMETHING'S HAPPENING--!

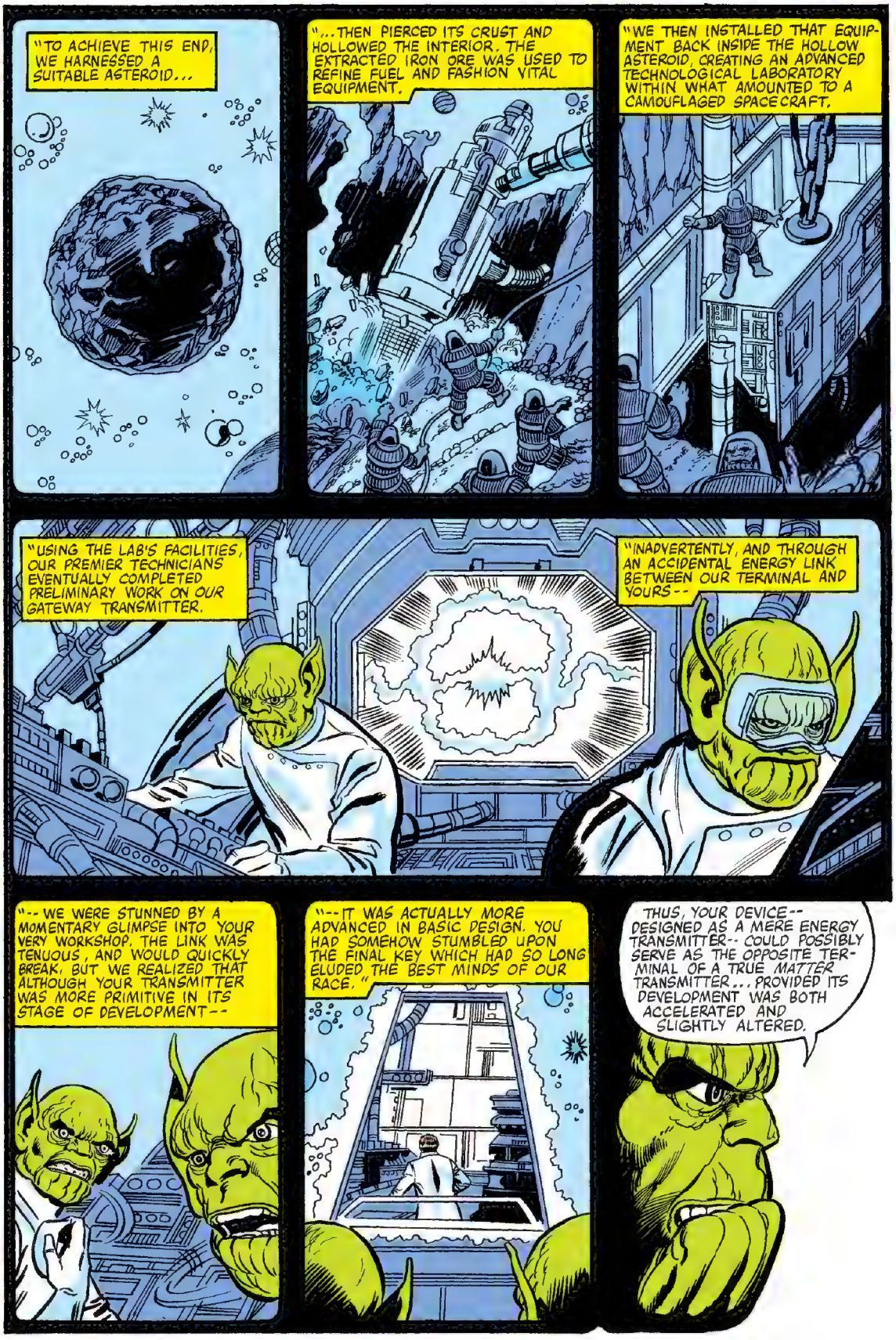

THE FAR WALL OF THE OTHER LAB IS SHATTERING, AND--
IT'S MAR-VELL--THE RENEGADE CAPTAIN OF THE KREE RACE!*
THE SCENE IS BEING OBSCURED BY FLYING DEBRIS, AND ONE OF THE PIECES--SURROUNDED BY A FIELD OF FORCE--HAS PIERCED THE PLANE OF THE INNER GATEWAY.
AND NOW IT'S CONTINUING ONWARD--TOWARD THE PLANE OF MY GATEWAY.
AHH
COMING CLOSER...
...CLOSER...
AND--
*WHO HAS TAKEN UP RESIDENCE ON EARTH, AND WHOM THE FF HAVE ENCOUNTERED SEVERAL TIMES IN THE PAST. --JIM.


I DON'T BELIEVE IT! IT CAME ALL THE WAY THROUGH, RIGHT INTO--
PING
OW!
IT'S FREEZING COLD--POSSESSING THE ABSOLUTE-ZERO TEMPERATURE OF OUTER SPACE! IF NOT FOR MY INSULATED GLOVES, IT COULD HAVE BROKEN MY HANDS OFF LIKE PIECES OF BRITTLE ICE!
AND NOW A WHOLE SWARM OF FRAGMENTS FROM THAT SHATTERED WALL IS BREACHING THE GULF BETWEEN THE TWO GATEWAYS! THE IMPLICATIONS ARE STAGGERING!
NO TELLING WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF ALL THAT DEBRIS COMES THROUGH--!
I'VE GOT TO LOCK MY TRANSMITTER IN STASIS--SHUT IT DOWN BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE!
PING
PING
PING
THE FIRST FEW SHARDS BURST THROUGH, WITH AN ENTIRE STORM FAST BEHIND...
BUT BEFORE THE STORM CAN BREAK--
CHEK
THANK HEAVENS--THE GATEWAY IS SHUTTING DOWN. FOR ALL I KNOW, THE ENTIRE MASS OF ANOTHER WORLD MIGHT HAVE TRIED TO STUFF ITSELF INTO THIS SINGLE ROOM!
BUT WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN--?
CAN'T THINK CLEARLY YET... I'M STILL TOO STUNNED...
I'D BETTER FIND THE OTHERS...TELL THEM WHAT HAPPENED...

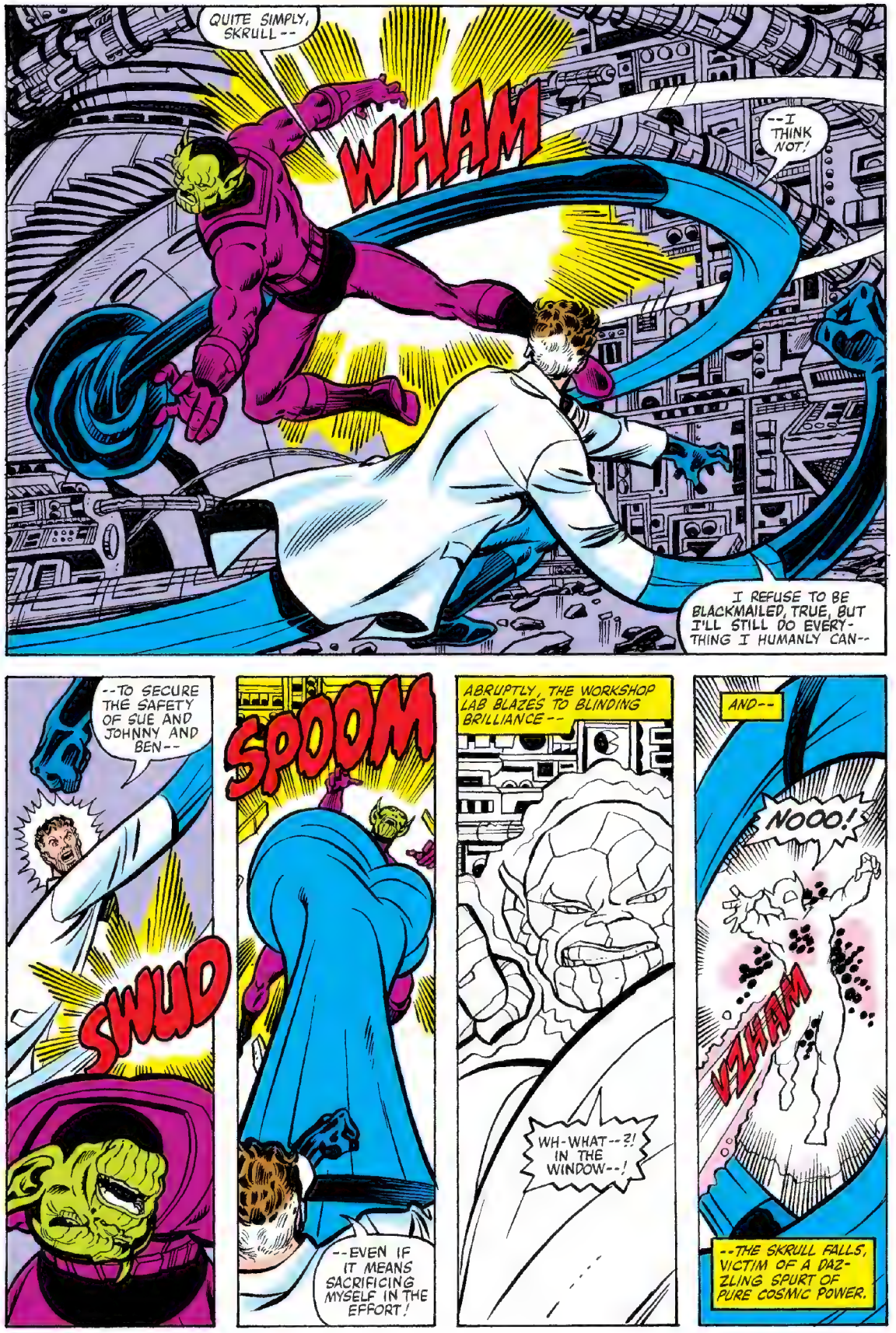

BUT, ENTERING THE KITCHEN STILL IN A FOG, HE FINDS ONLY HIS WIFE...
WHERE ARE THE OTHERS, SUE?
OH, WILLIE HAD TO GO HOME AND BEN AND JOHNNY DECIDED TO GO TO THE MOVIES.
AT THIS TIME? THAT'S NOT LIKE THEM.
YOU KNOW HOW THEY ARE SOMETIMES, REED -- LIKE A COUPLE OF IMPETUOUS KIDS.
YES... I GUESS YOU'RE RIGHT. WHAT WAS IN YOUR PACKAGE?
OH, JUST A CHANGE.
A CHANGE--?
YES, DARLING -- OF CLOTHES. IS SOMETHING WRONG? YOU'RE NOT LIKE YOURSELF AT ALL...
IT'S MY TRANSMITTER, SUE. IT'S FAR MORE THAN I THOUGHT...
...FAR MORE THAN I PLANNED OR INTENDED IT TO BE!
I HAD A FEELING IT WOULD BE -- FEMALE INTUITION. LET'S HAVE A LOOK...
I... DON'T EVEN KNOW HOW I DID IT OR WHAT IT FULLY MEANS...
...BUT I SEEM TO HAVE TAPPED INTO SOME OTHER ENERGY SOURCE, LOCATED I DON'T KNOW WHERE...
...BUT SOMEHOW IT'S TRIGGERED A CHANGE IN MY TRANSMITTER. IT'S FRIGHTENING, SUE. BUT I'VE SOMEHOW ACHIEVED THE IMPOSSIBLE. IT'S NO LONGER MERELY AN ENERGY TRANSMITTER... IT'S NOW A... WORKING MATTER TRANSMITTER!
HOW CAPTAIN MARVEL FITS INTO IT, I CAN'T EVEN GUESS, BUT SOMETHING IS WRONG. EVEN HOLDING YOU FEELS... FEELS --
EH--?!
--UNNATURAL, REED RICHARDS?
WILLIE LUMPKIN?! THEN YOU... YOU'RE REALLY --
YES, REED RICHARDS...
...I AM ACTUALLY A MEMBER OF THE SHAPE-CHANGING RACE KNOWN AS...
...THE SKRULLS!

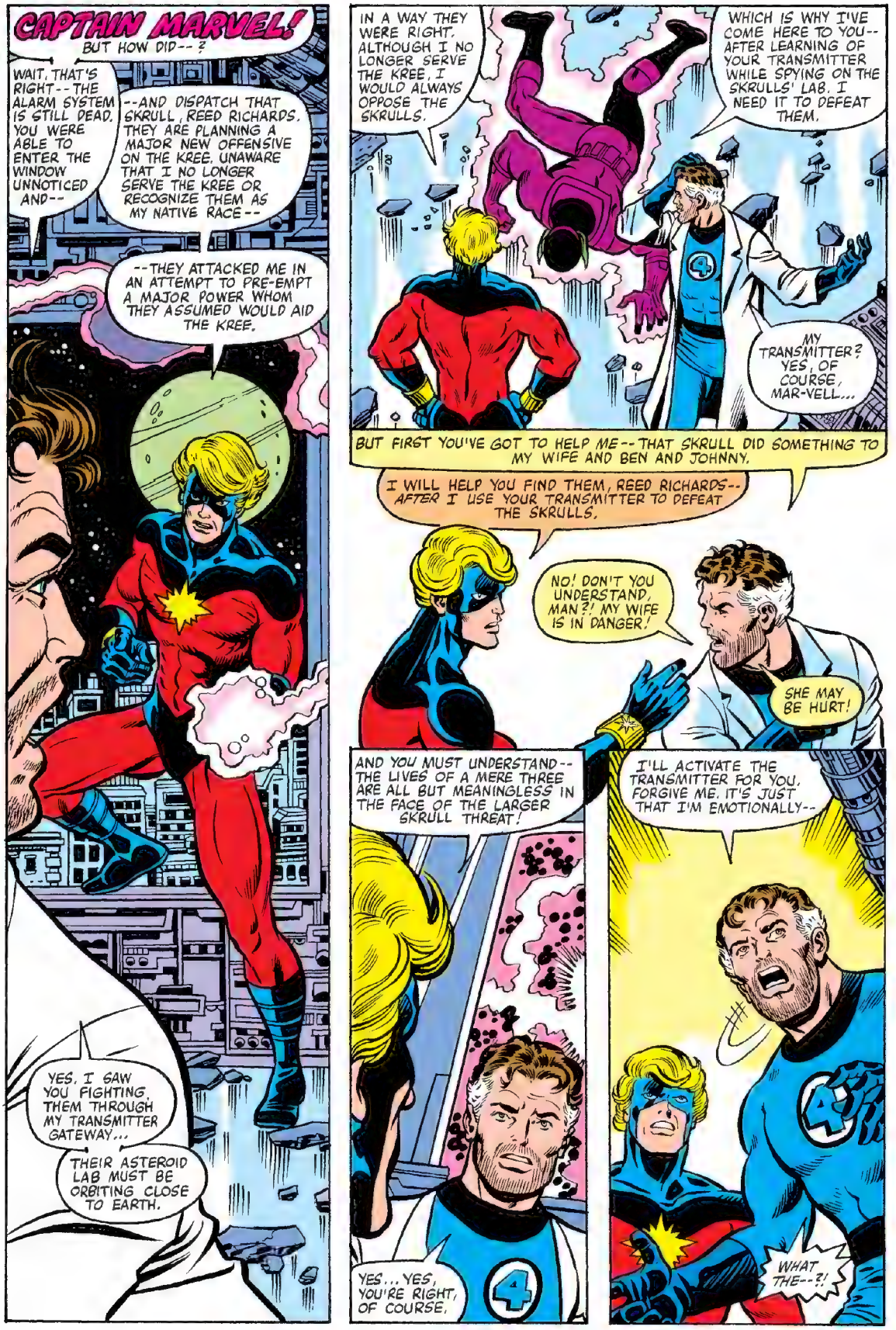
REED RICHARDS IS HORRIFIED BY THE WEIRD ALIEN'S PRESENCE, AND FULL REALIZATION HITS LIKE A THUNDERBOLT...
AND THAT PACKAGE YOU BROUGHT...
YES, A UNIQUE SURPRISE PACKAGE WHOSE CONTENTS ARE NOW RESTING STILL UNNOTICED OVER IN THAT CORNER!
BEHOLD, REED RICHARDS, A MIRACULOUS DEVICE FOR SHORTING OUT YOUR SUPERB ALARM SYSTEM -- BUT A MULTI-PURPOSE DEVICE SERVING MANY OTHER ENDS AS WELL...
MY WIFE! AND BEN AND JOHNNY! WHAT HAVE YOU DONE WITH THEM, SKRULL?!
AS I STARTED TO EXPLAIN, REED RICHARDS, MY INGENIOUSLY CRAFTED DEVICE IS GOOD FOR MANY PURPOSES...
4
FOR EXAMPLE, AFTER SHORTING OUT YOUR ALARMS --
"-- IT WAS DESIGNED TO TRIGGER A RELEASE OF INCAPACITATING SHOCK UPON THE OPENING OF ITS PACKAGE. SO, DESPITE THEIR VAUNTED POWERS, THE THING, INVISIBLE GIRL, AND HUMAN TORCH WERE... INCAPACITATED.
"THEY HAVE SINCE BEEN DISPOSED OF... FOR THE TIME BEING."
"DISPOSED OF"--?! WHAT DO YOU--
SILENCE! I HOLD THE UPPER HAND IN THIS SITUATION--
--AND YOU WILL REMAIN SILENT UNTIL I HAVE FINISHED MY EXPLANATION!

AFTER SHORTING YOUR ALARMS AND DISPOSING OF YOUR THREE COMPATRIOTS--
--I THEN USED MY DEVICE FOR A THIRD PURPOSE!
"I BROUGHT IT IN HERE TO YOUR WORKSHOP WHILE YOU WERE PREOCCUPIED CHECKING FOR DISTURBANCES IN YOUR SECURITY SYSTEM...
"...AND THEN I BEGAN THE REAL TEST OF YOUR TRANSMITTER--MY OWN TEST!"
THEN YOU TRIGGERED THE CHANGE IN MY TRANSMITTER--AND CAUSED THE APPEARANCE OF THAT OTHER GATEWAY!
YES.
YOU SEE, WE SKRULLS HAVE LONG BEEN AWARE OF YOUR DEVICE, REED RICHARDS. INDEED, WE HAVE BEEN WORKING ON ONE OF OUR OWN...
"IN THE PAST, AS YOU KNOW, WE HAVE BATTLED OUR SWORN ENEMIES THE KREE TIME AFTER TIME, EACH TIME ENDING IN DEFEAT OR STALEMATE.
"THE STRUGGLE IS NOW, AND HAS LONG BEEN, FROZEN IN A STASIS OF EQUALLY BALANCED POWER.
"TO RENEW THE STRIFE, WE NEED AN EDGE, AN ADVANTAGE--IN SHORT, SOME NEW TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT WHICH WILL RENDER US SUPERIOR IN A NEW OFFENSIVE...

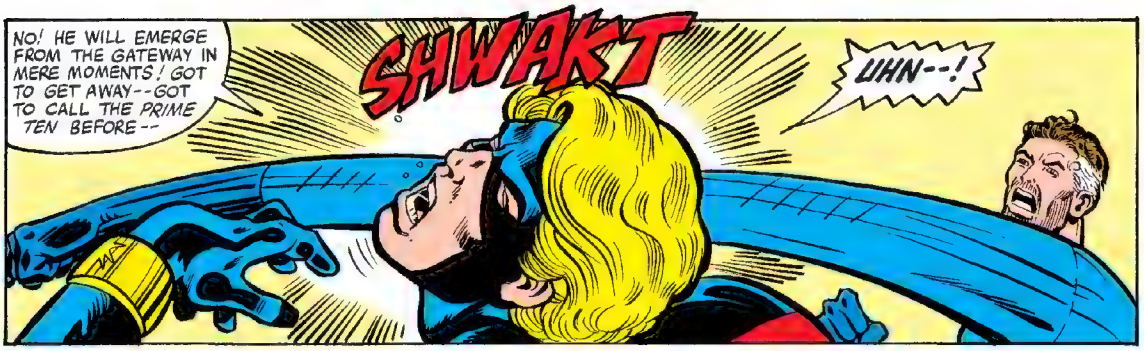

"TO ACHIEVE THIS END, WE HARNESSED A SUITABLE ASTEROID...
"...THEN PIERCED ITS CRUST AND HOLLOWED THE INTERIOR. THE EXTRACTED IRON ORE WAS USED TO REFINE FUEL AND FASHION VITAL EQUIPMENT.
"WE THEN INSTALLED THAT EQUIPMENT BACK INSIDE THE HOLLOW ASTEROID, CREATING AN ADVANCED TECHNOLOGICAL LABORATORY WITHIN WHAT AMOUNTED TO A CAMOUFLAGED SPACECRAFT.
"USING THE LAB'S FACILITIES, OUR PREMIER TECHNICIANS EVENTUALLY COMPLETED PRELIMINARY WORK ON OUR GATEWAY TRANSMITTER.
"INADVERTENTLY, AND THROUGH AN ACCIDENTAL ENERGY LINK BETWEEN OUR TERMINAL AND YOURS--
"-- WE WERE STUNNED BY A MOMENTARY GLIMPSE INTO YOUR VERY WORKSHOP. THE LINK WAS TENUOUS, AND WOULD QUICKLY BREAK. BUT WE REALIZED THAT ALTHOUGH YOUR TRANSMITTER WAS MORE PRIMITIVE IN ITS STAGE OF DEVELOPMENT--
"--IT WAS ACTUALLY MORE ADVANCED IN BASIC DESIGN. YOU HAD SOMEHOW STUMBLED UPON THE FINAL KEY WHICH HAD SO LONG ELUDED THE BEST MINDS OF OUR RACE."
THUS, YOUR DEVICE-- DESIGNED AS A MERE ENERGY TRANSMITTER-- COULD POSSIBLY SERVE AS THE OPPOSITE TERMINAL OF A TRUE MATTER TRANSMITTER... PROVIDED ITS DEVELOPMENT WAS BOTH ACCELERATED AND SLIGHTLY ALTERED.

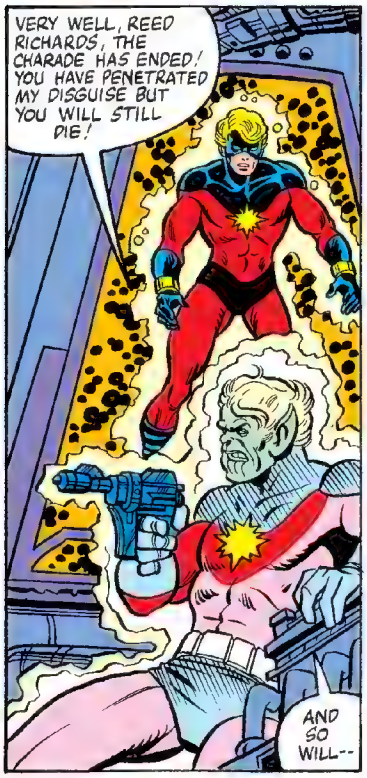
I USED MY "SURPRISE PACKAGE," OF COURSE, TO SERVE BOTH FUNCTIONS, RECHANNELING THE FREQUENCIES OF YOUR TRANSMITTER. I THEN ALTERED MY FORM TO MIMIC THAT OF YOUR WIFE, GIVING YOU TIME TO REALIZE THE IMPLICATIONS OF WHAT HAD HAPPENED BEFORE REVEALING MYSELF.
NOW HEAR ME, REED RICHARDS...
YOUR TERMINAL IS A BOON TO WAR, PROVIDING AUTOMATIC AND INSTANTANEOUS TRANSPORT OF TROOPS AND WEAPONRY, INSTANT RETREAT AND ESCAPE.
THEREFORE, I AM PREPARED TO MAKE YOU AN OFFER. SURRENDER YOUR DEVICE AND YOU WILL BE PERMITTED TO LIVE. I WILL EVEN TELL YOU WHERE TO FIND YOUR WIFE AND THE TWO OTHERS.
THE CHOICE IS YOURS. EARTH DOES NOT FIGURE INTO THE COMING STRUGGLE. I CARE NOT WHETHER YOU CHOOSE TO LIVE OR DIE. I DEMAND ONLY YOUR DECISION -- NOW.
N-NO! I CAN'T! LORD HELP ME, BUT NOT EVEN FOR SUE AND THE OTHERS --I CAN'T LET MY WORK BE PERVERTED AND PUT TO DESTRUCTIVE USE!
AH, YES, YOUR VAUNTED HUMAN MORALITY. WE SKRULLS ARE AWARE OF HOW YOUR GENIUS EINSTEIN WAS TORMENTED WHEN HIS THEORIES WERE PUT TO PRACTICAL USE IN DEVELOPING THE NUCLEAR BOMB.
BUT FOR ALL HIS GENIUS, EINSTEIN WAS A FOOL. MORALITY CANNOT STOP PROGRESS. STRUGGLE, COMPETITION, STRIFE -- THESE ARE THE NATURAL TRAITS OF ALL LIFEFORMS -- AND ONLY THROUGH WARFARE IS ANY MEANINGFUL PROGRESS EVER ACHIEVED.
YOU'RE WRONG, SKRULL! I ACHIEVED *THIS*, DIDN'T I? -- AND NOT FOR THE CAUSE OF WARFARE! AND EINSTEIN WAS ALSO A MAN OF PEACE!
HIS WORK WAS PERVERTED BY *OTHERS* TO THE ENDS OF WAR!
IT DOES NOT MATTER, REED RICHARDS. QUITE SIMPLY, IF YOU REFUSE TO SURRENDER YOUR DEVICE --
--YOU MUST DIE!

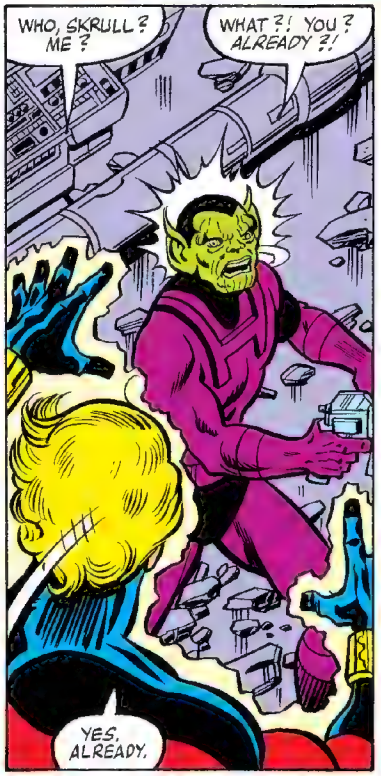

QUITE SIMPLY, SKRULL--
WHAM
--I THINK NOT!
I REFUSE TO BE BLACKMAILED, TRUE, BUT I'LL STILL DO EVERY-THING I HUMANLY CAN--
--TO SECURE THE SAFETY OF SUE AND JOHNNY AND BEN--
SWUD
SPOOM
--EVEN IF IT MEANS SACRIFICING MYSELF IN THE EFFORT!
ABRUPTLY, THE WORKSHOP LAB BLAZES TO BLINDING BRILLIANCE--
WH-WHAT--?! IN THE WINDOW--!
AND--
NOOO!
VZHAM
--THE SKRULL FALLS, VICTIM OF A DAZ-ZLING SPURT OF PURE COSMIC POWER.


CAPTAIN MARVEL!
BUT HOW DID--?
WAIT, THAT'S RIGHT--THE ALARM SYSTEM IS STILL DEAD. YOU WERE ABLE TO ENTER THE WINDOW UNNOTICED AND--
--AND DISPATCH THAT SKRULL, REED RICHARDS. THEY ARE PLANNING A MAJOR NEW OFFENSIVE ON THE KREE. UNAWARE THAT I NO LONGER SERVE THE KREE OR RECOGNIZE THEM AS MY NATIVE RACE--
--THEY ATTACKED ME IN AN ATTEMPT TO PRE-EMPT A MAJOR POWER WHOM THEY ASSUMED WOULD AID THE KREE.
YES, I SAW YOU FIGHTING THEM THROUGH MY TRANSMITTER GATEWAY...
THEIR ASTEROID LAB MUST BE ORBITING CLOSE TO EARTH.
IN A WAY THEY WERE RIGHT. ALTHOUGH I NO LONGER SERVE THE KREE, I WOULD ALWAYS OPPOSE THE SKRULLS.
WHICH IS WHY I'VE COME HERE TO YOU--AFTER LEARNING OF YOUR TRANSMITTER WHILE SPYING ON THE SKRULLS' LAB. I NEED IT TO DEFEAT THEM.
MY TRANSMITTER? YES, OF COURSE, MAR-VELL...
BUT FIRST YOU'VE GOT TO HELP ME--THAT SKRULL DID SOMETHING TO MY WIFE AND BEN AND JOHNNY.
I WILL HELP YOU FIND THEM, REED RICHARDS--AFTER I USE YOUR TRANSMITTER TO DEFEAT THE SKRULLS.
NO! DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND, MAN?! MY WIFE IS IN DANGER!
SHE MAY BE HURT!
AND YOU MUST UNDERSTAND--THE LIVES OF A MERE THREE ARE ALL BUT MEANINGLESS IN THE FACE OF THE LARGER SKRULL THREAT!
YES...YES, YOU'RE RIGHT, OF COURSE.
I'LL ACTIVATE THE TRANSMITTER FOR YOU. FORGIVE ME. IT'S JUST THAT I'M EMOTIONALLY--
WHAT THE--?!

WITHIN THE INNER GATEWAY-- ANOTHER CAPTAIN MARVEL-- STILL IN THE SKRULL ASTEROID LAB!
THEN ONE OF YOU IS AN IMPOSTER--A SKRULL HIMSELF!
HE IS THE SKRULL, REED RICHARDS--A SUPER-SKRULL PREPARING TO USE THE GATEWAYS TO COME HERE-- MASQUERADING AS ME TO DECEIVE YOU! DON'T YOU SEE?! THE SKRULLS WANT YOUR DEVICE TOO! YOU'VE GOT TO USE IT ON HIM NOW-- STOP HIM BEFORE HE GETS HERE!
"USE" IT ON HIM? WHAT DO YOU MEAN? HOW--?
INSTEAD OF TRANSMITTING AND REASSEMBLING HIS ATOMS HERE, YOU MUST SCRAMBLE THOSE ATOMS, DISPERSE THEM THROUGH SPACE AND TIME--NOW! YOU MUST USE THE TRANSMITTER NOW!
YES... VERY WELL... I'LL USE THE TRANSMITTER...
... BUT NOT TO DESTROY HIM!
TEK
THE REAL CAPTAIN MARVEL WOULD NEVER ASK ME TO DO SUCH A THING--
--NOT EVEN TO A SKRULL!
NO! WHAT ARE YOU DOING--?!
I'M DOING ALMOST EXACTLY AS YOU REQUESTED, SKRULL--!
I'M USING THE TRANSMITTER--BUT I'M USING IT TO BRING THE REAL CAPTAIN MARVEL HERE!

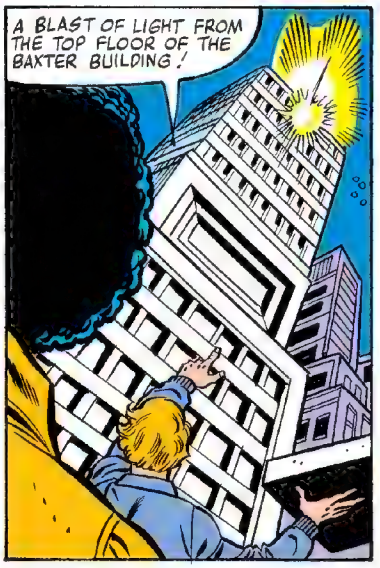

NO! HE WILL EMERGE FROM THE GATEWAY IN MERE MOMENTS! GOT TO GET AWAY--GOT TO CALL THE PRIME TEN BEFORE--
SHWAKT
UHN--!


VERY WELL, REED RICHARDS, THE CHARADE HAS ENDED! YOU HAVE PENETRATED MY DISGUISE BUT YOU WILL STILL DIE!
AND SO WILL--

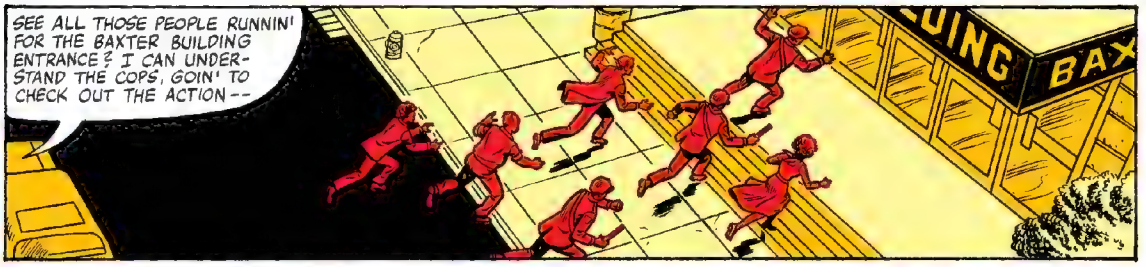

WHO, SKRULL? ME?
WHAT?! YOU? ALREADY?!
YES, ALREADY.

ALMOST CALMLY, MAR-VELL GESTURES WITH THE AWESOME POWER COSMIC, AND--
FROOM

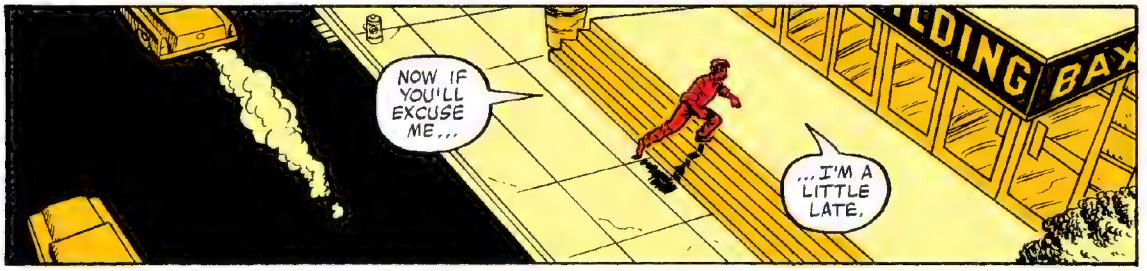
LOOK!
HM?
DIDJA SEE THAT?!


A BLAST OF LIGHT FROM THE TOP FLOOR OF THE BAXTER BUILDING!

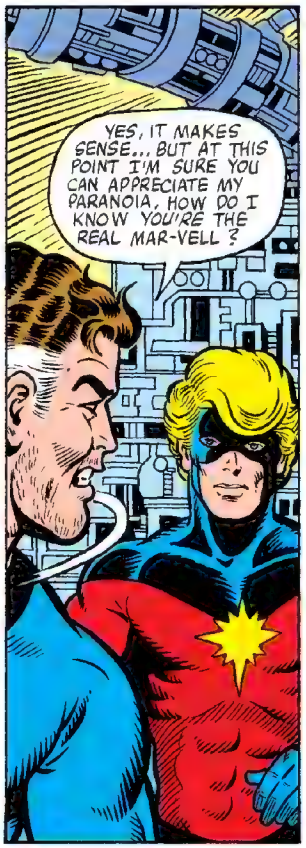
MUST BE THE FANTASTIC FOUR UP TO SOMETHIN' AGAIN.
YES.
PIZZA
AND LOOK OVER THERE!

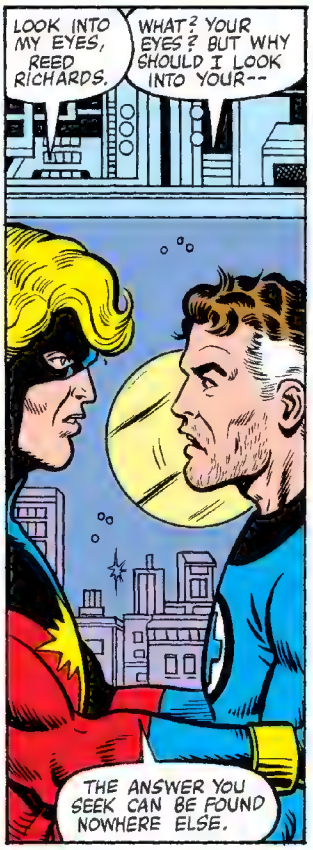

SEE ALL THOSE PEOPLE RUNNIN' FOR THE BAXTER BUILDING ENTRANCE? I CAN UNDERSTAND THE COPS, GOIN' TO CHECK OUT THE ACTION--

--BUT WHAT DO ALL THE OTHERS THINK THEY'RE DOIN'?!
KEEP NEW YORK CLEAN
I WOULDN'T KNOW, I'M SURE.


NOW IF YOU'LL EXCUSE ME...
...I'M A LITTLE LATE.

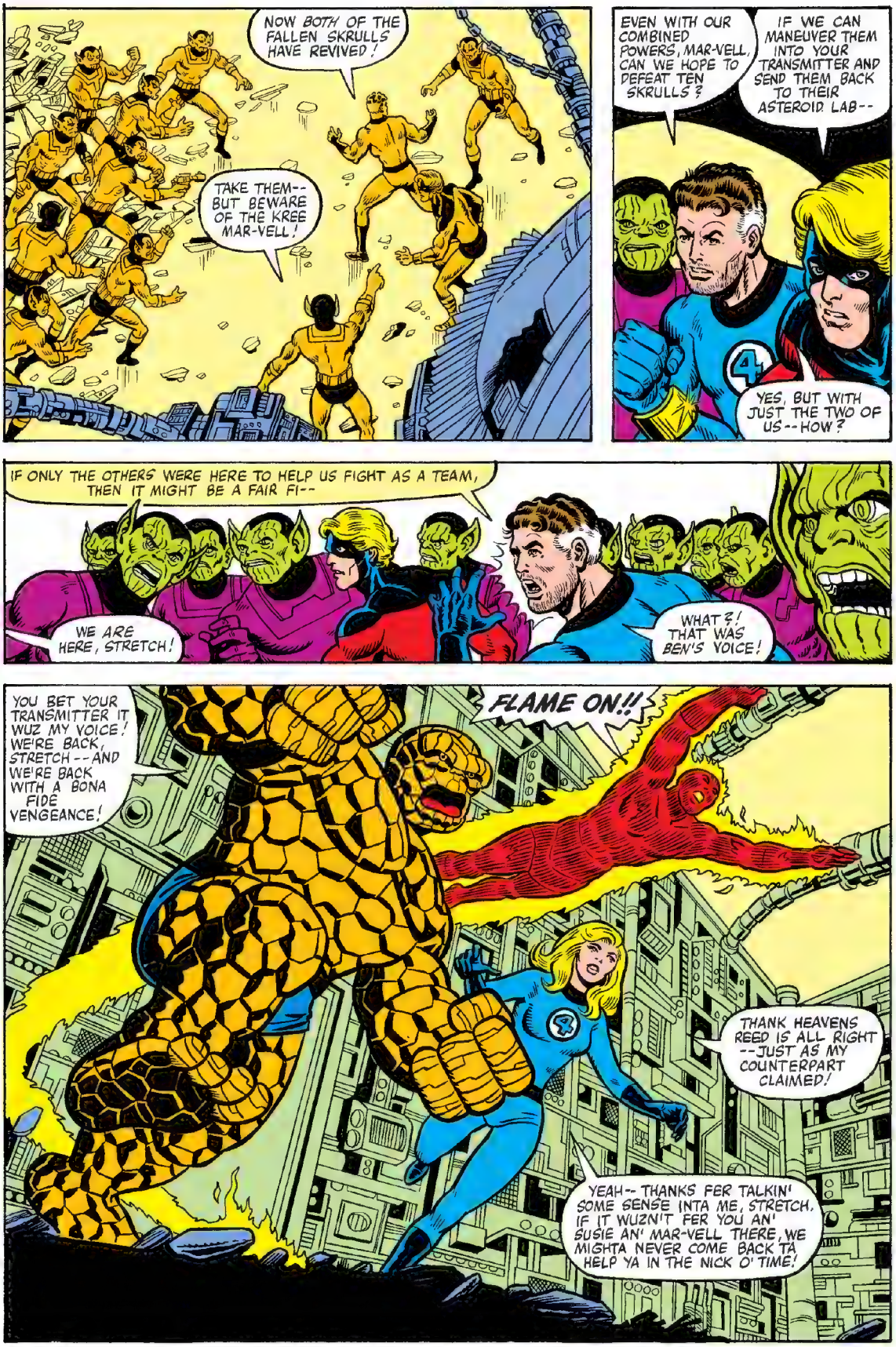
THE SKRULLS MUST HAVE SUSPECTED YOU WOULDN'T BE BLACKMAILED AND NEEDED A PLOY TO GAIN YOUR TRUST IN CASE ANYTHING WENT WRONG... SUCH AS ONE OF YOU EXCUSING HIMSELF FROM THE PACKAGE OPENING.

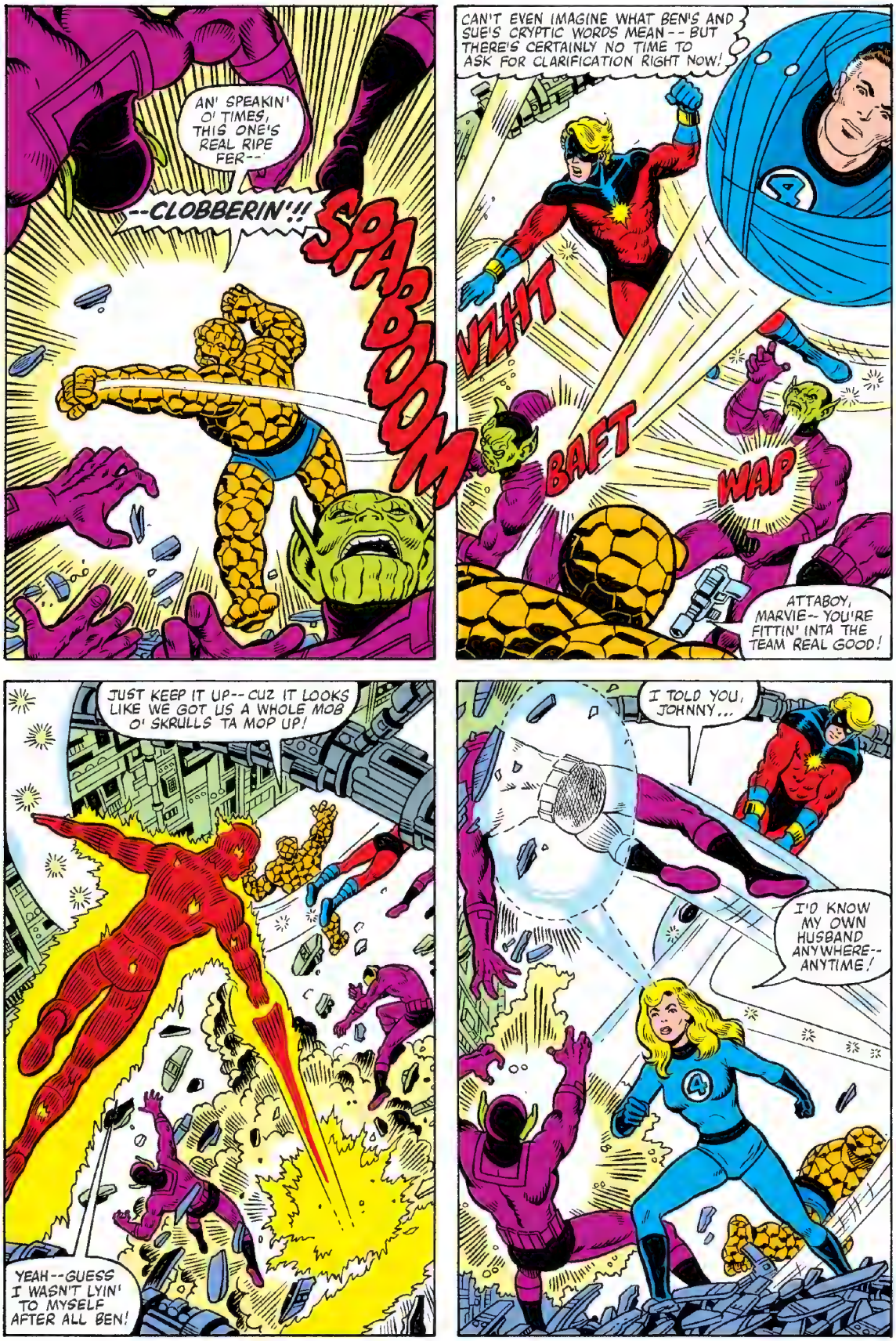

YES, IT MAKES SENSE... BUT AT THIS POINT I'M SURE YOU CAN APPRECIATE MY PARANOIA. HOW DO I KNOW YOU'RE THE REAL MAR-VELL?


LOOK INTO MY EYES, REED RICHARDS.
WHAT? YOUR EYES? BUT WHY SHOULD I LOOK INTO YOUR--
THE ANSWER YOU SEEK CAN BE FOUND NOWHERE ELSE.

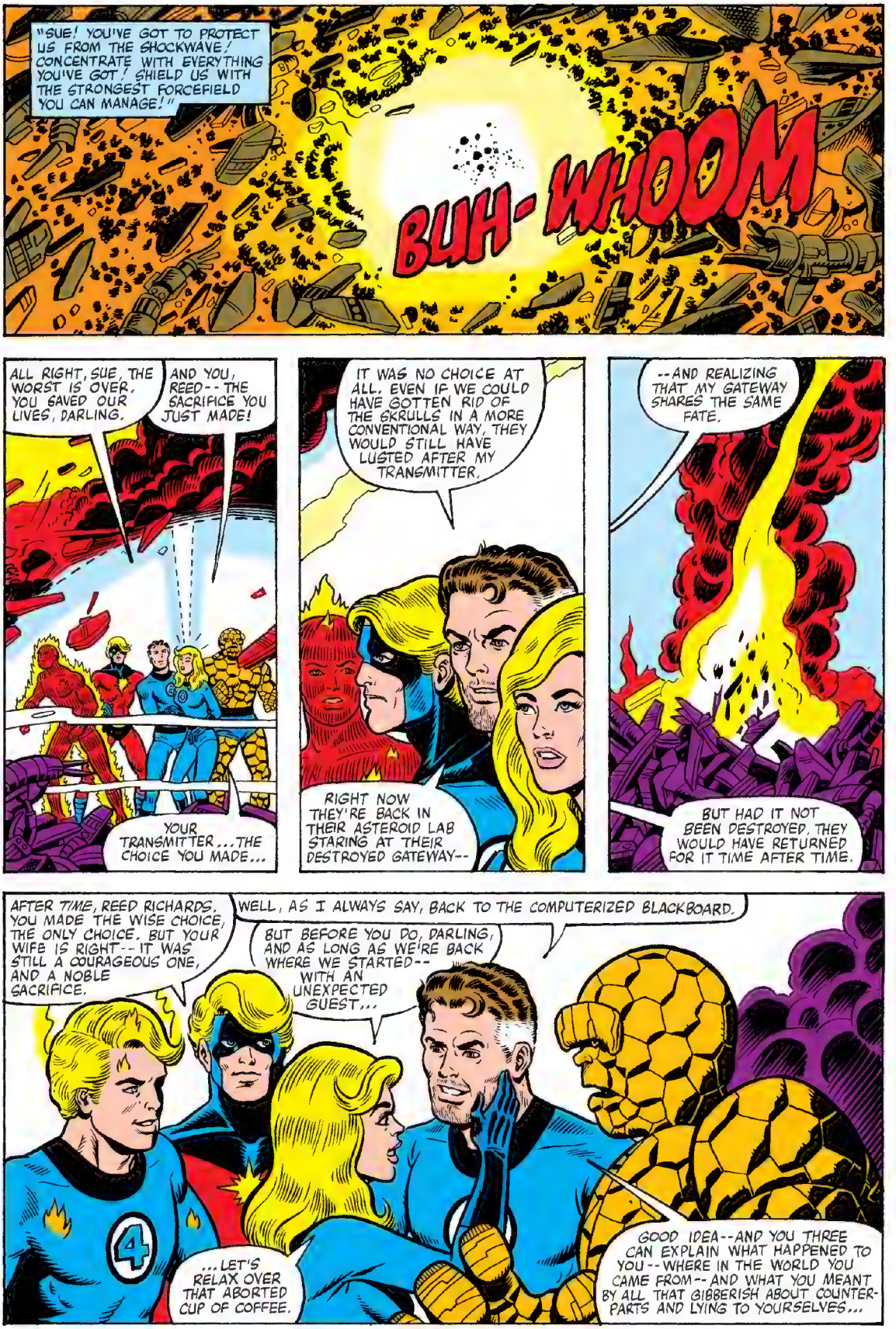
OH.
OH... NO... YOUR... YOUR EYES... I... I NEVER KNEW...

"... NEVER REALIZED THE POWER YOU POSSESS... THE AWESOME KNOWLEDGE AND AWARENESS...
"... THE DEPTHS OF PEACE AND MAJESTY... "
...LIKE... LIKE LOOKING THROUGH A WINDOW TO THE VERY SOUL OF THE UNIVERSE!
THEN YOU ARE CONVINCED I AM WHOM I CLAIM TO BE?
YOU... YOU COULD BE NO OTHER, MAR-VELL.
BUT NOW... WHAT DID THE SKRULL MEAN BY THE "PRIME TEN" AND--
ISHZZZZ
THE WALL, REED RICHARDS--! IT'S STARTING TO DISINTEGRATE!
AND THE FIRST SKRULL--HE'S REVIVING!
WE ARE THE PRIME TEN, RICHARDS -- MINUS THE TWO WHOM YOU HAVE ALREADY MET.
GOOD LORD! THAT'S THE VENDOR WHO SETS UP IN FRONT OF THE BAXTER BUILDING -- BUT HE'S A SKRULL! THEY'RE ALL SKRULLS!
INDEED -- TEN PRIME SKRULLS HAND-PICKED FOR THIS MISSION -- TO TAKE YOUR TRANSMITTER AT ANY AND ALL COSTS!
OUR EARLIER SCHEMES OF SUBTLETY HAVE FAILED, REED RICHARDS. NOW IT IS TIME TO SET ASIDE ALL FALSE PRETENSES AND SEIZE OUR OBJECTIVE BY FORCE!

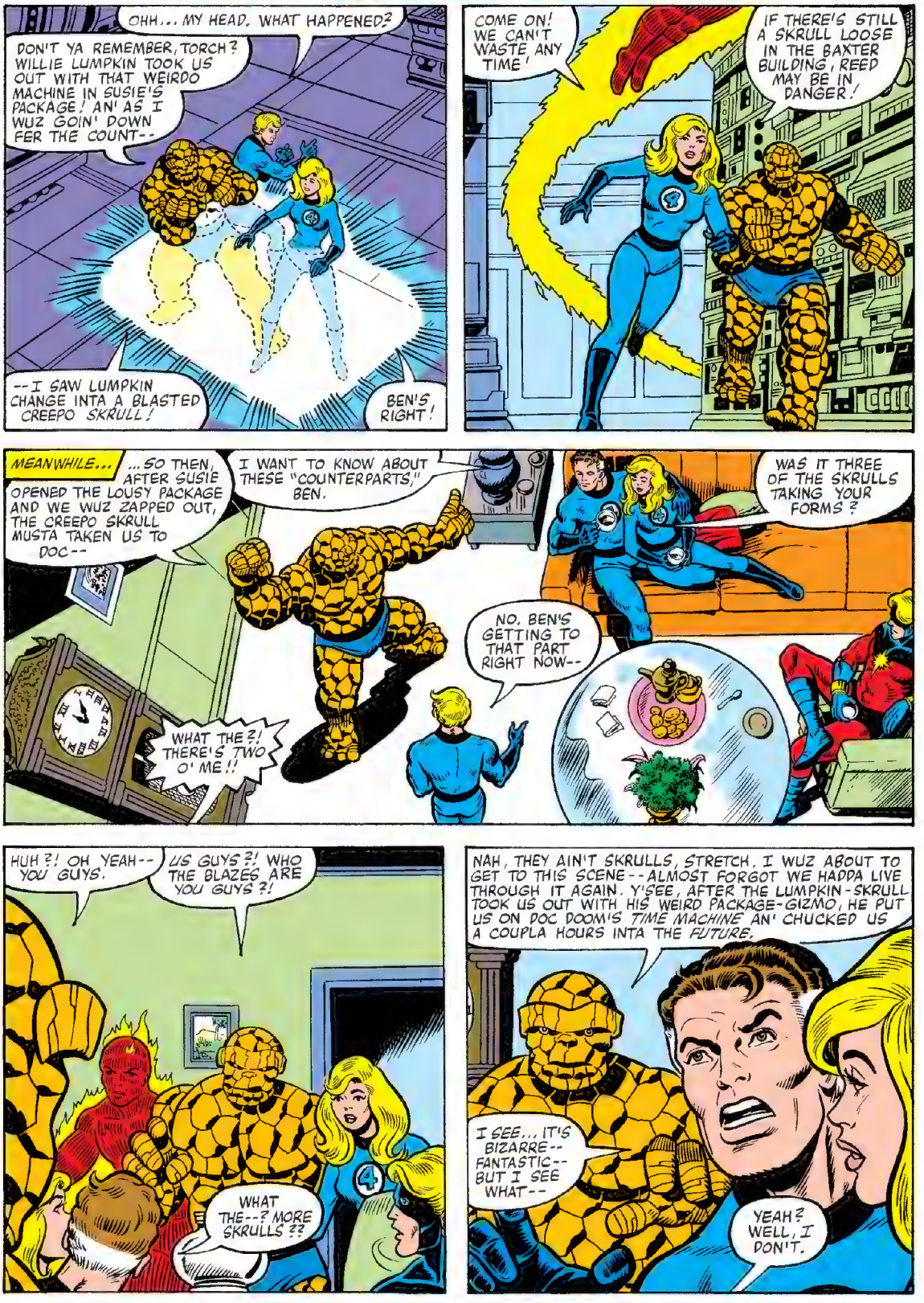

NOW BOTH OF THE FALLEN SKRULLS HAVE REVIVED!
TAKE THEM-- BUT BEWARE OF THE KREE MAR-VELL!
EVEN WITH OUR COMBINED POWERS, MAR-VELL, CAN WE HOPE TO DEFEAT TEN SKRULLS?
IF WE CAN MANEUVER THEM INTO YOUR TRANSMITTER AND SEND THEM BACK TO THEIR ASTEROID LAB--
YES, BUT WITH JUST THE TWO OF US--HOW?
IF ONLY THE OTHERS WERE HERE TO HELP US FIGHT AS A TEAM, THEN IT MIGHT BE A FAIR FI--
WE ARE HERE, STRETCH!
WHAT?! THAT WAS BEN'S VOICE!
YOU BET YOUR TRANSMITTER IT WUZ MY VOICE! WE'RE BACK, STRETCH--AND WE'RE BACK WITH A BONA FIDE VENGEANCE!
FLAME ON!!
THANK HEAVENS REED IS ALL RIGHT --JUST AS MY COUNTERPART CLAIMED!
YEAH-- THANKS FER TALKIN' SOME SENSE INTA ME, STRETCH. IF IT WUZN'T FER YOU AN' SUSIE AN' MAR-VELL THERE, WE MIGHTA NEVER COME BACK TA HELP YA IN THE NICK O' TIME!

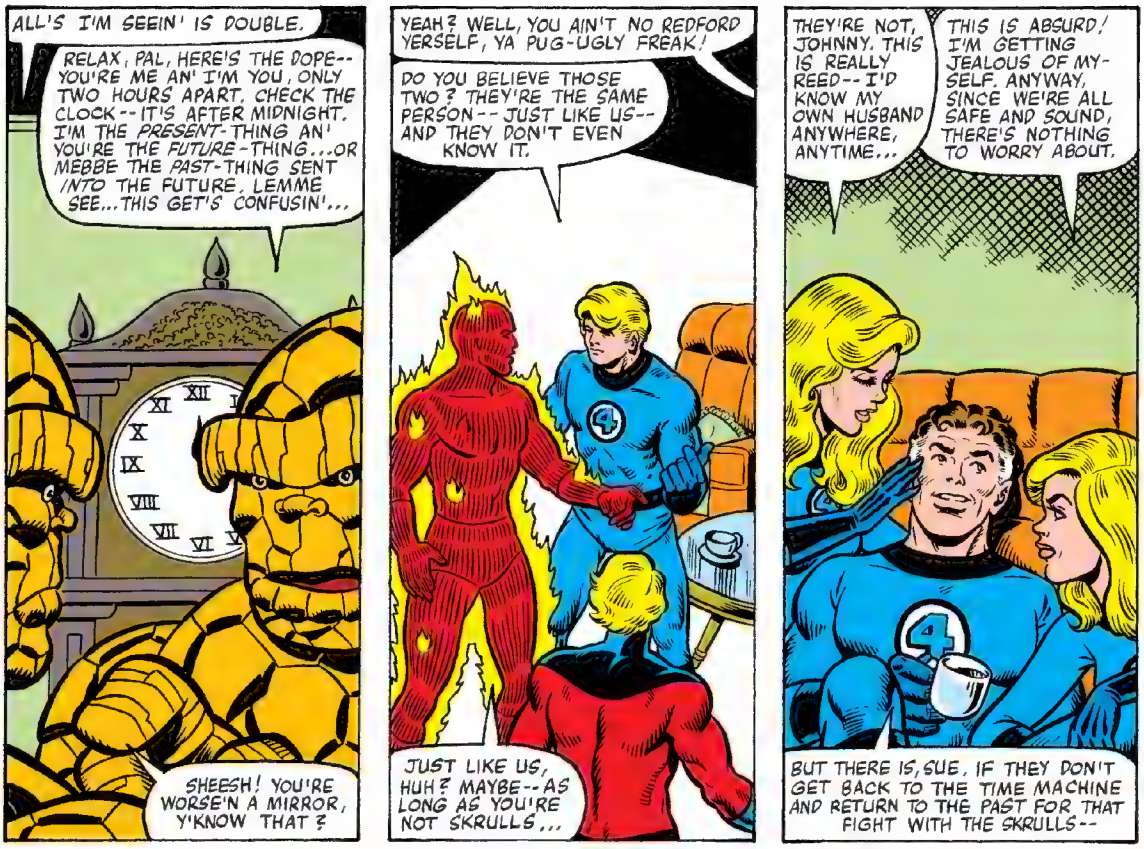

AN' SPEAKIN' O' TIMES, THIS ONE'S REAL RIPE FER--
--CLOBBERIN'!!
SPA
BOOM
CAN'T EVEN IMAGINE WHAT BEN'S AND SUE'S CRYPTIC WORDS MEAN-- BUT THERE'S CERTAINLY NO TIME TO ASK FOR CLARIFICATION RIGHT NOW!
VZHT
BAFT
WAP
ATTABOY, MARVIE-- YOU'RE FITTIN' INTA THE TEAM REAL GOOD!
JUST KEEP IT UP-- CUZ IT LOOKS LIKE WE GOT US A WHOLE MOB O' SKRULLS TA MOP UP!
YEAH--GUESS I WASN'T LYIN' TO MYSELF AFTER ALL BEN!
I TOLD YOU, JOHNNY...
I'D KNOW MY OWN HUSBAND ANYWHERE-- ANYTIME!

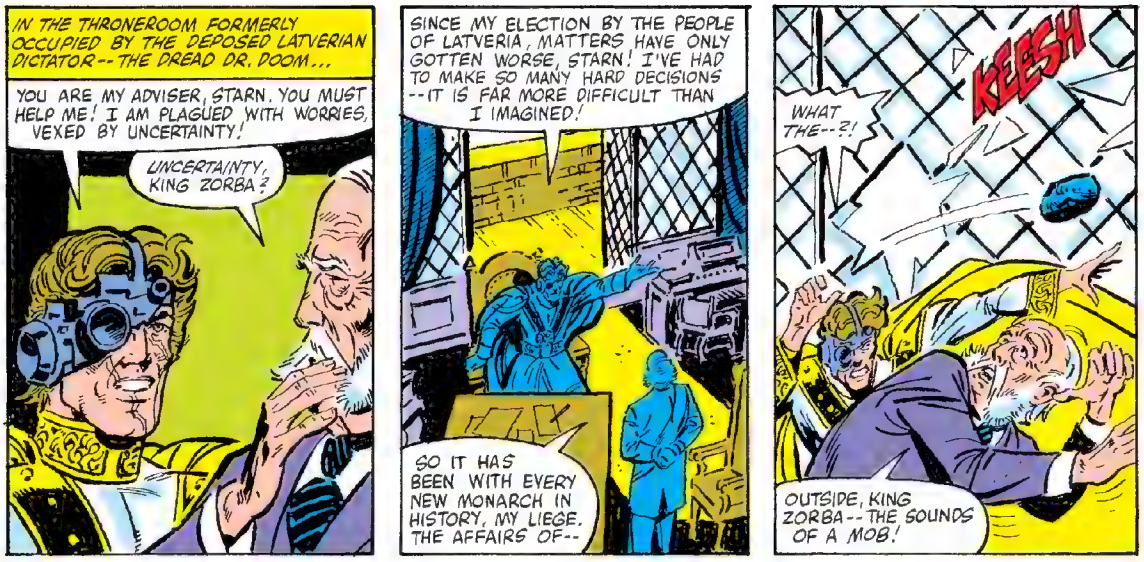
NOW, REED RICHARDS -- THEY'RE STUNNED! YOU'VE GOT TO USE YOUR TRANSMITTER TO SEND THEM BACK BEFORE THEY RECOVER AND RENEW THE FIGHT!
SUE--GATHER ALL TEN OF THEM INTO ONE OF YOUR FORCE-BUBBLES!
GOOD WORK, SUE! NOW BEN--HOIST THEM UP AND HURL THEM DIRECTLY INTO THE TRANSMITTER'S GATEWAY!
BUT WON'T THAT BUST THE BLAMED THING--?
NO! JUST DO AS I SAY, BEN!
YOU GOT IT, STRETCH--
--BUT IF I WUZ YOU, I'D AT LEAST DUCK!
BEN DID IT! THEY'RE ALL IN--FLOATING IN THE GULF BETWEEN THE TWO GATEWAYS!
QUICKLY THEN--ACTIVATE YOUR TRANSMITTER!
WAIT! WITH ALL TEN IN THERE, IT'S CAUSING AN OVERLOAD! THE ONLY WAY TO SEND THEM BACK DICTATES SIMULTANEOUS DESTRUCTION OF THE TRANSMITTER ITSELF!
OVERLOAD
ALL THOSE ENDLESS HOURS OF WORK--WORK THAT CAN NEVER BE PRECISELY REPEATED --WIPED OUT WITH ONE PUSH OF THE SWITCH!
BUT AFTER ONLY A MOMENT'S AGONIZED HESITATION, AND IN THE SHADOW OF EINSTEIN'S GHOST--
THERE'S NO CHOICE.
NONE AT ALL.
CHOK
FEEDBACK
FEEDBACK! IT'S GOING TO IMPLODE!


"SUE! YOU'VE GOT TO PROTECT US FROM THE SHOCKWAVE! CONCENTRATE WITH EVERYTHING YOU'VE GOT! SHIELD US WITH THE STRONGEST FORCEFIELD YOU CAN MANAGE!"
BUH-WHOOM
ALL RIGHT, SUE, THE WORST IS OVER. YOU SAVED OUR LIVES, DARLING.
AND YOU, REED--THE SACRIFICE YOU JUST MADE!
YOUR TRANSMITTER...THE CHOICE YOU MADE...
IT WAS NO CHOICE AT ALL. EVEN IF WE COULD HAVE GOTTEN RID OF THE SKRULLS IN A MORE CONVENTIONAL WAY, THEY WOULD STILL HAVE LUSTED AFTER MY TRANSMITTER.
RIGHT NOW THEY'RE BACK IN THEIR ASTEROID LAB STARING AT THEIR DESTROYED GATEWAY--
--AND REALIZING THAT MY GATEWAY SHARES THE SAME FATE.
BUT HAD IT NOT BEEN DESTROYED, THEY WOULD HAVE RETURNED FOR IT TIME AFTER TIME.
AFTER TIME, REED RICHARDS, YOU MADE THE WISE CHOICE, THE ONLY CHOICE. BUT YOUR WIFE IS RIGHT--IT WAS STILL A COURAGEOUS ONE, AND A NOBLE SACRIFICE.
WELL, AS I ALWAYS SAY, BACK TO THE COMPUTERIZED BLACKBOARD.
BUT BEFORE YOU DO, DARLING, AND AS LONG AS WE'RE BACK WHERE WE STARTED--WITH AN UNEXPECTED GUEST...
...LET'S RELAX OVER THAT ABORTED CUP OF COFFEE.
GOOD IDEA--AND YOU THREE CAN EXPLAIN WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU--WHERE IN THE WORLD YOU CAME FROM--AND WHAT YOU MEANT BY ALL THAT GIBBERISH ABOUT COUNTERPARTS AND LYING TO YOURSELVES...

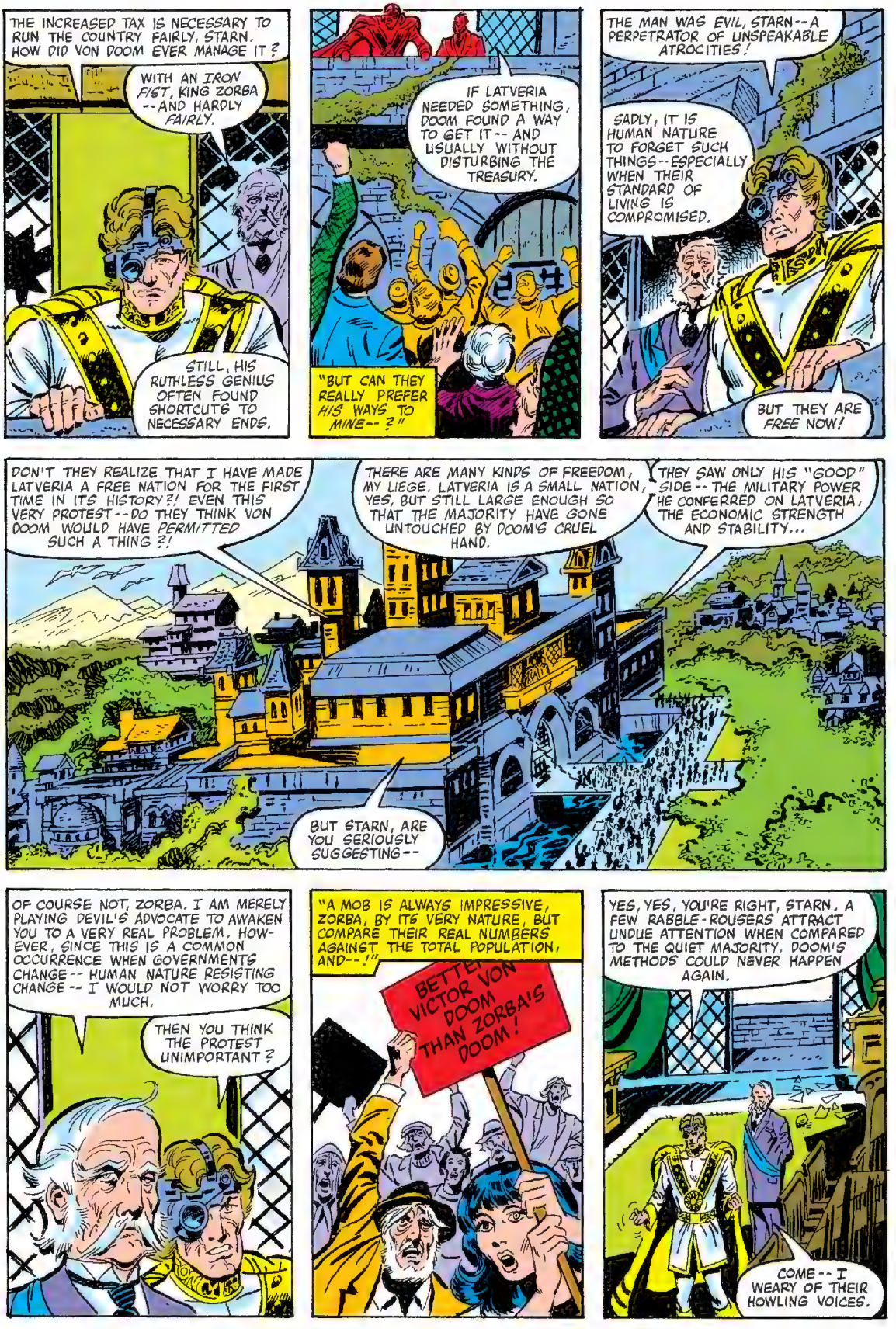
EPILOGUE

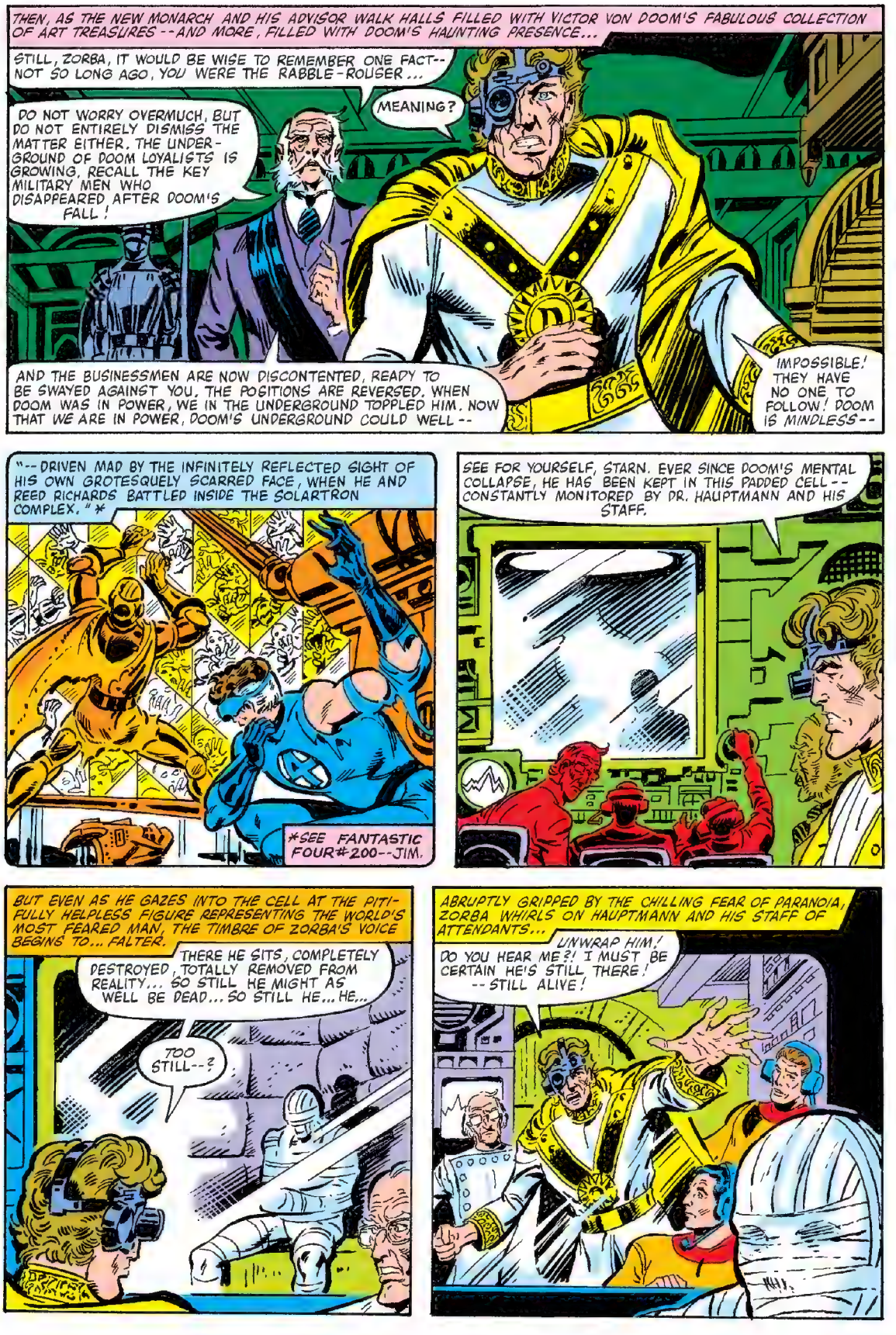

OHH... MY HEAD. WHAT HAPPENED?
DON'T YA REMEMBER, TORCH? WILLIE LUMPKIN TOOK US OUT WITH THAT WEIRDO MACHINE IN SUSIE'S PACKAGE! AN' AS I WUZ GOIN' DOWN FER THE COUNT--
--I SAW LUMPKIN CHANGE INTA A BLASTED CREEPO SKRULL!
BEN'S RIGHT!
COME ON! WE CAN'T WASTE ANY TIME!
IF THERE'S STILL A SKRULL LOOSE IN THE BAXTER BUILDING, REED MAY BE IN DANGER!
MEANWHILE...
...SO THEN, AFTER SUSIE OPENED THE LOUSY PACKAGE AND WE WUZ ZAPPED OUT, THE CREEPO SKRULL MUSTA TAKEN US TO DOC--
I WANT TO KNOW ABOUT THESE "COUNTERPARTS," BEN.
WAS IT THREE OF THE SKRULLS TAKING YOUR FORMS?
NO. BEN'S GETTING TO THAT PART RIGHT NOW--
WHAT THE?! THERE'S TWO O' ME!!
HUH?! OH YEAH-- YOU GUYS.
US GUYS?! WHO THE BLAZES ARE YOU GUYS?!
WHAT THE--? MORE SKRULLS??
NAH, THEY AIN'T SKRULLS, STRETCH. I WUZ ABOUT TO GET TO THIS SCENE--ALMOST FORGOT WE HADDA LIVE THROUGH IT AGAIN. Y'SEE, AFTER THE LUMPKIN-SKRULL TOOK US OUT WITH HIS WEIRD PACKAGE-GIZMO, HE PUT US ON DOC DOOM'S TIME MACHINE AN' CHUCKED US A COUPLA HOURS INTA THE FUTURE.
I SEE... IT'S BIZARRE-- FANTASTIC-- BUT I SEE WHAT--
YEAH? WELL, I DON'T.

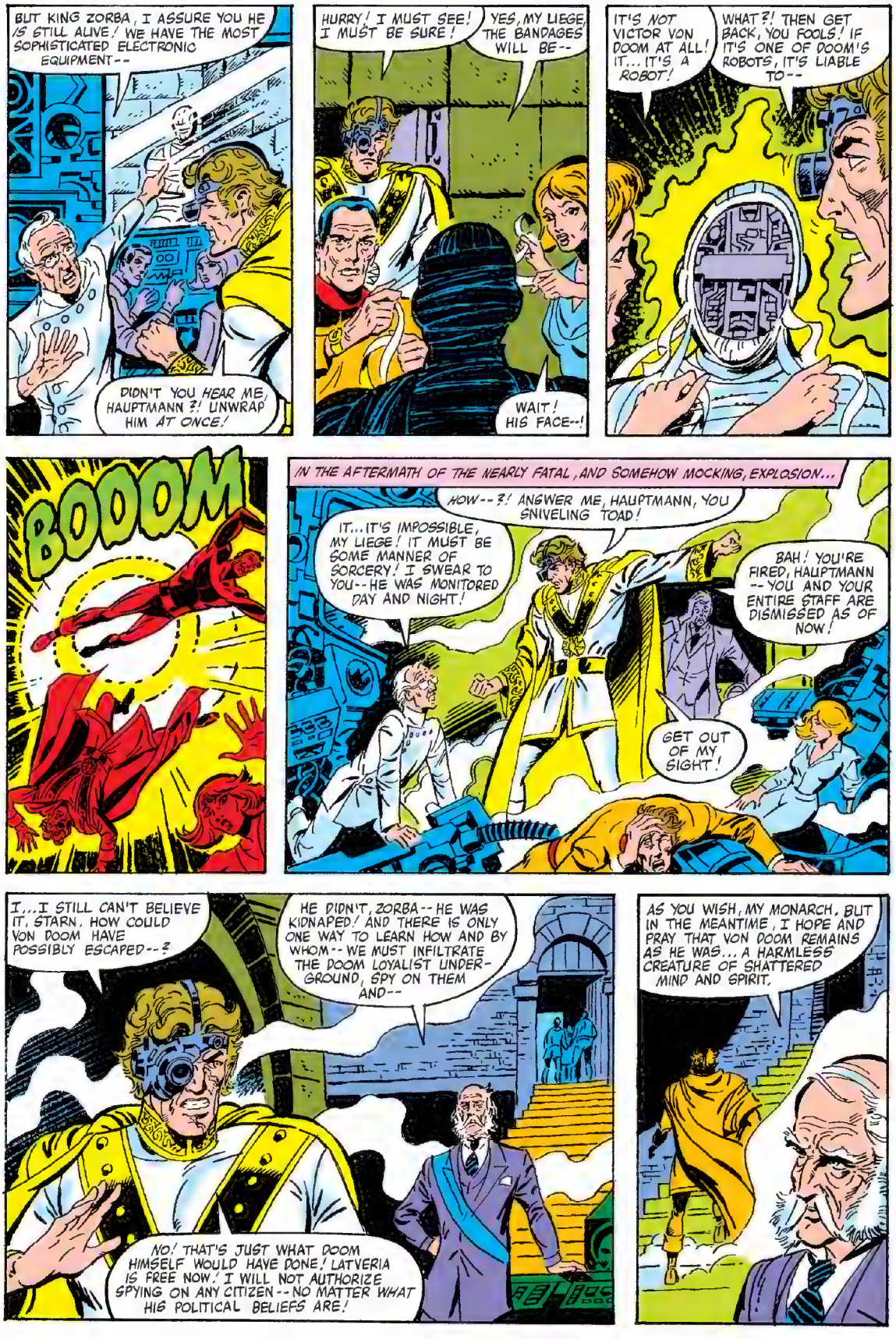

ALL'S I'M SEEIN' IS DOUBLE.
RELAX, PAL, HERE'S THE DOPE--YOU'RE ME AN' I'M YOU, ONLY TWO HOURS APART. CHECK THE CLOCK--IT'S AFTER MIDNIGHT. I'M THE PRESENT-THING AN' YOU'RE THE FUTURE-THING...OR MEBBE THE PAST-THING SENT INTO THE FUTURE. LEMME SEE...THIS GET'S CONFUSIN'...
SHEESH! YOU'RE WORSE'N A MIRROR, Y'KNOW THAT?
YEAH? WELL, YOU AIN'T NO REDFORD YERSELF, YA PUG-UGLY FREAK!
DO YOU BELIEVE THOSE TWO? THEY'RE THE SAME PERSON--JUST LIKE US--AND THEY DON'T EVEN KNOW IT.
JUST LIKE US, HUH? MAYBE--AS LONG AS YOU'RE NOT SKRULLS...
THEY'RE NOT, JOHNNY. THIS IS REALLY REED--I'D KNOW MY OWN HUSBAND ANYWHERE, ANYTIME...
THIS IS ABSURD! I'M GETTING JEALOUS OF MYSELF. ANYWAY, SINCE WE'RE ALL SAFE AND SOUND, THERE'S NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT.
BUT THERE IS, SUE. IF THEY DON'T GET BACK TO THE TIME MACHINE AND RETURN TO THE PAST FOR THAT FIGHT WITH THE SKRULLS--
THAT'S RIGHT! OUR SAFETY'S IN DANGER AS FAR AS YOU JOKERS ARE CONCERNED, SO WHADDAYA JUST STANDIN' THERE FOR?! GO BACK AN' HELP US!
WAITAMINNIT! I AIN'T CONVINCED YOU'RE REALLY US IN THE FUTURE YET. EVEN SKRULLS COULD TURN A CLOCK TWO HOURS AHEAD!
ARE YOU CALLIN' ME A SKRULL--ME?--BASHFUL BENJAMIN J. GRIMM?! I OUGHTTA--
THERE'S AN EASY WAY TO FIND OUT. JUST TAKE THE TIME MACHINE BACK AND SEE.
OF COURSE, ACCORDING TO YOUR OWN EARTH'S EINSTEIN, THERE'S NO RUSH. YOU COULD STAY HERE ALL NIGHT--
--ALL MONTH, IN FACT--AND STILL RETURN TO THE PROPER TIME AS LONG AS YOU DON'T ALTER THE INEVITABILITY OF THE PAST OR FUTURE.
A MONTH WITH THAT UGLY CREEP? NO THANKS. IF WE GOT A FIGHT AHEAD OF US--OR BEHIND US--LET'S GO GET IT OVER WITH NOW, OR THEN, OR WHENEVER.
DIDJA HEAR THAT CLOWN? THE NERVE! BUT THANK PETUNIA WE FINALLY GOT RID OF 'EM, CUZ THE CRAZY THING IS--I REMEMBER GOIN' THROUGH THAT WHOLE BLAMED CONVERSATION NOT MORE'N TWO HOURS AGO...
...FROM THE OTHER SIDE.
4

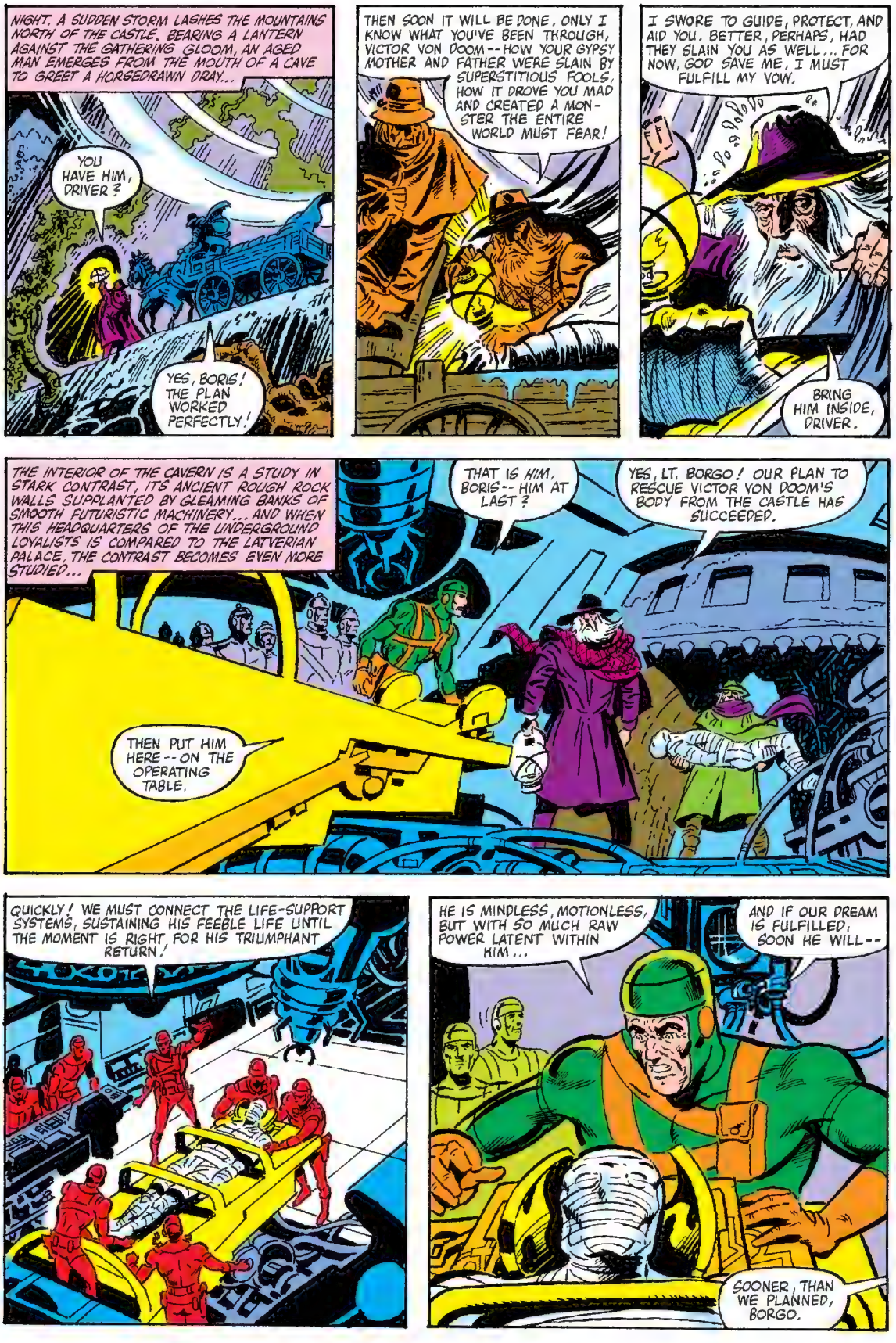

IN THE THRONEROOM FORMERLY OCCUPIED BY THE DEPOSED LATVERIAN DICTATOR--THE DREAD DR. DOOM...
YOU ARE MY ADVISER, STARN. YOU MUST HELP ME! I AM PLAGUED WITH WORRIES, VEXED BY UNCERTAINTY!
UNCERTAINTY, KING ZORBA?
SINCE MY ELECTION BY THE PEOPLE OF LATVERIA, MATTERS HAVE ONLY GOTTEN WORSE, STARN! I'VE HAD TO MAKE SO MANY HARD DECISIONS --IT IS FAR MORE DIFFICULT THAN I IMAGINED!
SO IT HAS BEEN WITH EVERY NEW MONARCH IN HISTORY, MY LIEGE. THE AFFAIRS OF--
KEESH
WHAT THE--?!
OUTSIDE, KING ZORBA--THE SOUNDS OF A MOB!

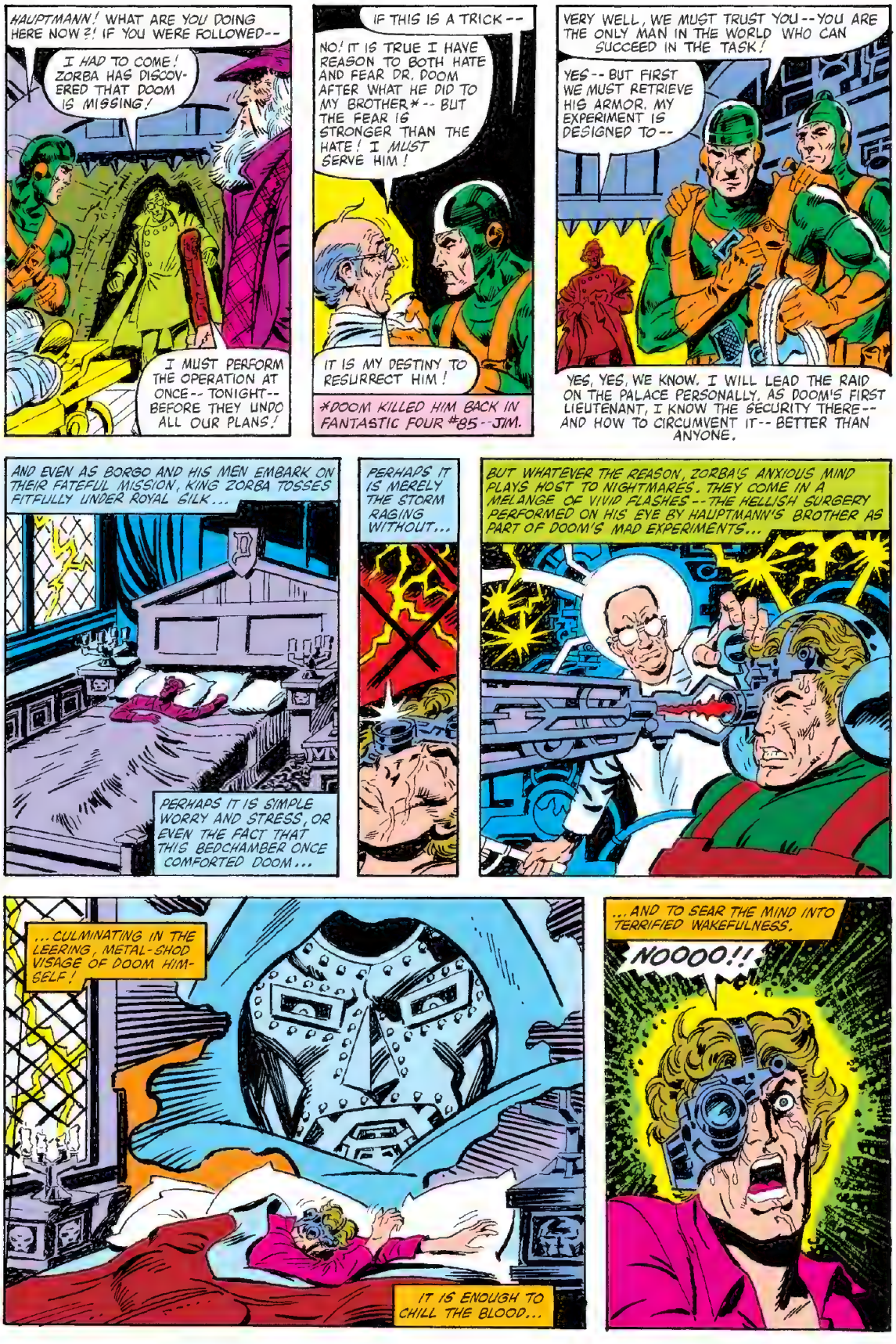
THE RETURN OF DOCTOR DOOM!
CHAPTER ONE
The POWER OF the PEOPLE!
IT IS AS I FEARED, KING ZORBA. THE PEOPLE PROTEST THE SWEEPING CHANGES YOU HAVE INSTITUTED!
BUT THEY ELECTED ME TO MAKE CHANGES--TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF LIFE IN LATVERIA!
NO MORE TAXES!
GIVE US DOOM!
DOOM WAS BETTER!
YOU'VE BETRAYED US, ZORBA! YOUR INCREASED TAXES WILL BREAK THE BACK OF OUR NATION!
A CHILLING NEW CHAPTER IN THE HISTORY OF LATVERIA!
CHRONICLED BY:
DOUG MOENCH WRITER
TOM SUTTON ARTIST
JIM NOVAK LETTERER
BEN SEAN COLORIST
JIM SALICRUP EDITOR
JIM SHOOTER, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

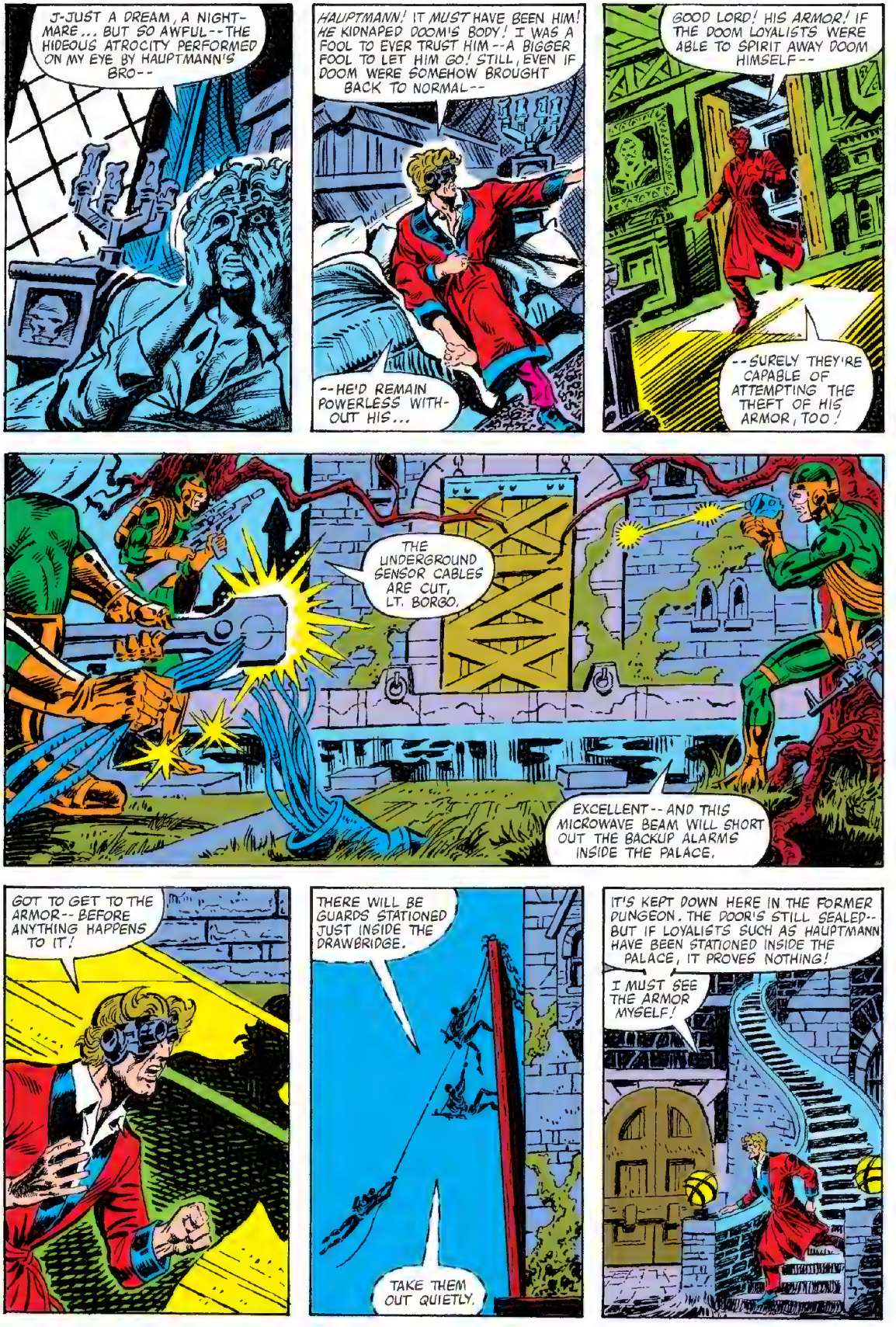

THE INCREASED TAX IS NECESSARY TO RUN THE COUNTRY FAIRLY, STARN. HOW DID VON DOOM EVER MANAGE IT?
WITH AN IRON FIST, KING ZORBA --AND HARDLY FAIRLY.
STILL, HIS RUTHLESS GENIUS OFTEN FOUND SHORTCUTS TO NECESSARY ENDS.
IF LATVERIA NEEDED SOMETHING, DOOM FOUND A WAY TO GET IT -- AND USUALLY WITHOUT DISTURBING THE TREASURY.
"BUT CAN THEY REALLY PREFER HIS WAYS TO MINE--?"
THE MAN WAS EVIL, STARN--A PERPETRATOR OF UNSPEAKABLE ATROCITIES!
SADLY, IT IS HUMAN NATURE TO FORGET SUCH THINGS--ESPECIALLY WHEN THEIR STANDARD OF LIVING IS COMPROMISED.
BUT THEY ARE FREE NOW!
DON'T THEY REALIZE THAT I HAVE MADE LATVERIA A FREE NATION FOR THE FIRST TIME IN ITS HISTORY?! EVEN THIS VERY PROTEST--DO THEY THINK VON DOOM WOULD HAVE PERMITTED SUCH A THING?!
THERE ARE MANY KINDS OF FREEDOM, MY LIEGE. LATVERIA IS A SMALL NATION, YES, BUT STILL LARGE ENOUGH SO THAT THE MAJORITY HAVE GONE UNTOUCHED BY DOOM'S CRUEL HAND.
THEY SAW ONLY HIS "GOOD" SIDE -- THE MILITARY POWER HE CONFERRED ON LATVERIA, THE ECONOMIC STRENGTH AND STABILITY...
BUT STARN, ARE YOU SERIOUSLY SUGGESTING--
OF COURSE NOT, ZORBA. I AM MERELY PLAYING DEVIL'S ADVOCATE TO AWAKEN YOU TO A VERY REAL PROBLEM. HOWEVER, SINCE THIS IS A COMMON OCCURRENCE WHEN GOVERNMENTS CHANGE -- HUMAN NATURE RESISTING CHANGE -- I WOULD NOT WORRY TOO MUCH.
THEN YOU THINK THE PROTEST UNIMPORTANT?
"A MOB IS ALWAYS IMPRESSIVE, ZORBA, BY ITS VERY NATURE, BUT COMPARE THEIR REAL NUMBERS AGAINST THE TOTAL POPULATION, AND--!"
BETTER VICTOR VON DOOM THAN ZORBA'S DOOM!
YES, YES, YOU'RE RIGHT, STARN. A FEW RABBLE-ROUSERS ATTRACT UNDUE ATTENTION WHEN COMPARED TO THE QUIET MAJORITY. DOOM'S METHODS COULD NEVER HAPPEN AGAIN.
COME--I WEARY OF THEIR HOWLING VOICES.

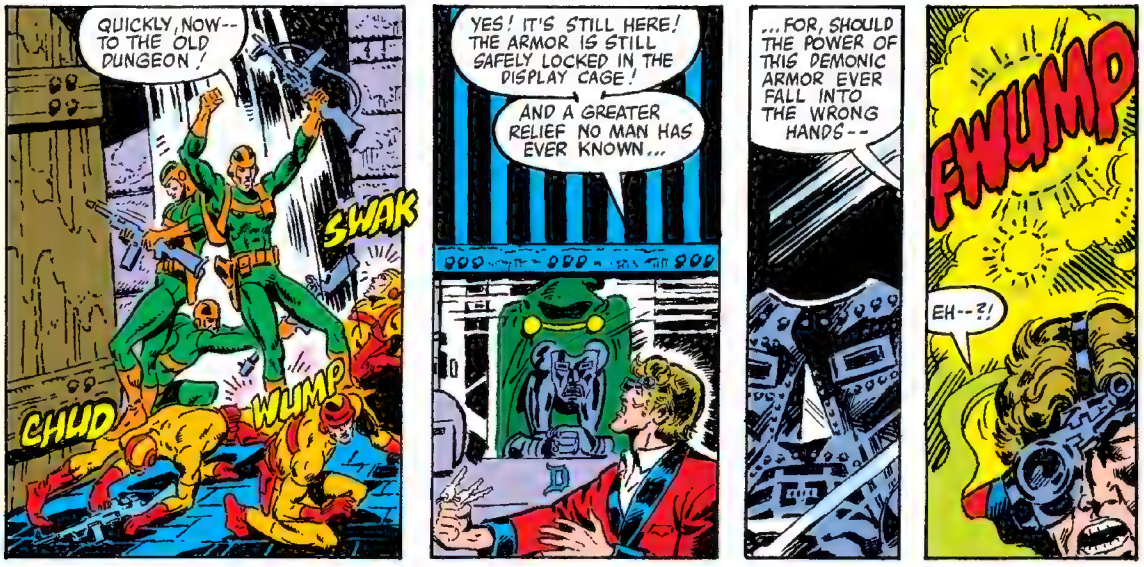

THEN, AS THE NEW MONARCH AND HIS ADVISOR WALK HALLS FILLED WITH VICTOR VON DOOM'S FABULOUS COLLECTION OF ART TREASURES--AND MORE, FILLED WITH DOOM'S HAUNTING PRESENCE...
STILL, ZORBA, IT WOULD BE WISE TO REMEMBER ONE FACT--NOT SO LONG AGO, YOU WERE THE RABBLE-ROUSER...
MEANING?
DO NOT WORRY OVERMUCH, BUT DO NOT ENTIRELY DISMISS THE MATTER EITHER. THE UNDER-GROUND OF DOOM LOYALISTS IS GROWING, RECALL THE KEY MILITARY MEN WHO DISAPPEARED AFTER DOOM'S FALL!
AND THE BUSINESSMEN ARE NOW DISCONTENTED, READY TO BE SWAYED AGAINST YOU. THE POSITIONS ARE REVERSED. WHEN DOOM WAS IN POWER, WE IN THE UNDERGROUND TOPPLED HIM. NOW THAT WE ARE IN POWER, DOOM'S UNDERGROUND COULD WELL--
IMPOSSIBLE! THEY HAVE NO ONE TO FOLLOW! DOOM IS MINDLESS--
"--DRIVEN MAD BY THE INFINITELY REFLECTED SIGHT OF HIS OWN GROTESQUELY SCARRED FACE, WHEN HE AND REED RICHARDS BATTLED INSIDE THE SOLARTRON COMPLEX." *
*SEE FANTASTIC FOUR #200--JIM.
SEE FOR YOURSELF, STARN. EVER SINCE DOOM'S MENTAL COLLAPSE, HE HAS BEEN KEPT IN THIS PADDED CELL--CONSTANTLY MONITORED BY DR. HAUPTMANN AND HIS STAFF.
BUT EVEN AS HE GAZES INTO THE CELL AT THE PITIFULLY HELPLESS FIGURE REPRESENTING THE WORLD'S MOST FEARED MAN, THE TIMBRE OF ZORBA'S VOICE BEGINS TO... FALTER.
THERE HE SITS, COMPLETELY DESTROYED, TOTALLY REMOVED FROM REALITY... SO STILL HE MIGHT AS WELL BE DEAD... SO STILL HE... HE...
TOO STILL--?
ABRUPTLY GRIPPED BY THE CHILLING FEAR OF PARANOIA, ZORBA WHIRLS ON HAUPTMANN AND HIS STAFF OF ATTENDANTS...
UNWRAP HIM! DO YOU HEAR ME?! I MUST BE CERTAIN HE'S STILL THERE! --STILL ALIVE!


BUT KING ZORBA, I ASSURE YOU HE IS STILL ALIVE! WE HAVE THE MOST SOPHISTICATED ELECTRONIC EQUIPMENT--
DIDN'T YOU HEAR ME, HAUPTMANN?! UNWRAP HIM AT ONCE!
HURRY! I MUST SEE! I MUST BE SURE!
YES, MY LIEGE, THE BANDAGES WILL BE--
WAIT! HIS FACE--!
IT'S NOT VICTOR VON DOOM AT ALL! IT... IT'S A ROBOT!
WHAT?! THEN GET BACK, YOU FOOLS! IF IT'S ONE OF DOOM'S ROBOTS, IT'S LIABLE TO--
BOOOM
IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE NEARLY FATAL, AND SOMEHOW MOCKING, EXPLOSION...
HOW--?! ANSWER ME, HAUPTMANN, YOU SNIVELING TOAD!
IT... IT'S IMPOSSIBLE, MY LIEGE! IT MUST BE SOME MANNER OF SORCERY! I SWEAR TO YOU--HE WAS MONITORED DAY AND NIGHT!
BAH! YOU'RE FIRED, HAUPTMANN --YOU AND YOUR ENTIRE STAFF ARE DISMISSED AS OF NOW!
GET OUT OF MY SIGHT!
I... I STILL CAN'T BELIEVE IT, STARN. HOW COULD VON DOOM HAVE POSSIBLY ESCAPED--?
HE DIDN'T, ZORBA--HE WAS KIDNAPED! AND THERE IS ONLY ONE WAY TO LEARN HOW AND BY WHOM--WE MUST INFILTRATE THE DOOM LOYALIST UNDERGROUND, SPY ON THEM AND--
NO! THAT'S JUST WHAT DOOM HIMSELF WOULD HAVE DONE! LATVERIA IS FREE NOW! I WILL NOT AUTHORIZE SPYING ON ANY CITIZEN--NO MATTER WHAT HIS POLITICAL BELIEFS ARE!
AS YOU WISH, MY MONARCH. BUT IN THE MEANTIME, I HOPE AND PRAY THAT VON DOOM REMAINS AS HE WAS... A HARMLESS CREATURE OF SHATTERED MIND AND SPIRIT.

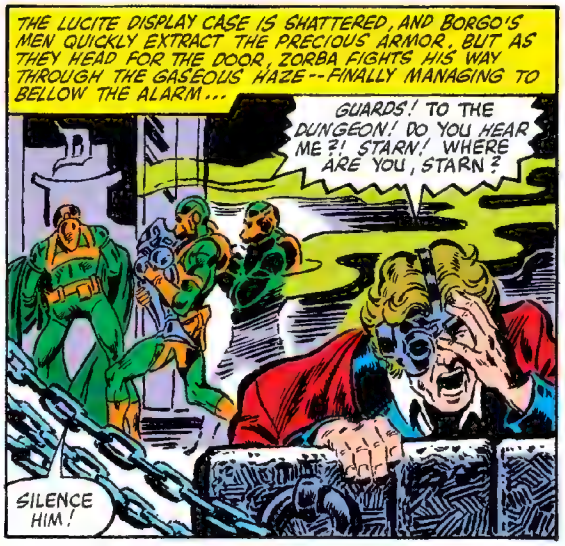

NIGHT. A SUDDEN STORM LASHES THE MOUNTAINS NORTH OF THE CASTLE. BEARING A LANTERN AGAINST THE GATHERING GLOOM, AN AGED MAN EMERGES FROM THE MOUTH OF A CAVE TO GREET A HORSEDRAWN DRAY...
YOU HAVE HIM, DRIVER?
YES, BORIS! THE PLAN WORKED PERFECTLY!
THEN SOON IT WILL BE DONE, ONLY I KNOW WHAT YOU'VE BEEN THROUGH, VICTOR VON DOOM--HOW YOUR GYPSY MOTHER AND FATHER WERE SLAIN BY SUPERSTITIOUS FOOLS, HOW IT DROVE YOU MAD AND CREATED A MONSTER THE ENTIRE WORLD MUST FEAR!
I SWORE TO GUIDE, PROTECT, AND AID YOU. BETTER, PERHAPS, HAD THEY SLAIN YOU AS WELL... FOR NOW, GOD SAVE ME, I MUST FULFILL MY VOW.
BRING HIM INSIDE, DRIVER.
THE INTERIOR OF THE CAVERN IS A STUDY IN STARK CONTRAST. ITS ANCIENT ROUGH ROCK WALLS SUPPLANTED BY GLEAMING BANKS OF SMOOTH FUTURISTIC MACHINERY... AND WHEN THIS HEADQUARTERS OF THE UNDERGROUND LOYALISTS IS COMPARED TO THE LATVERIAN PALACE, THE CONTRAST BECOMES EVEN MORE STUDIED...
THAT IS HIM, BORIS--HIM AT LAST?
YES, LT. BORGO! OUR PLAN TO RESCUE VICTOR VON DOOM'S BODY FROM THE CASTLE HAS SUCCEEDED.
THEN PUT HIM HERE--ON THE OPERATING TABLE.
QUICKLY! WE MUST CONNECT THE LIFE-SUPPORT SYSTEMS, SUSTAINING HIS FEEBLE LIFE UNTIL THE MOMENT IS RIGHT, FOR HIS TRIUMPHANT RETURN!
HE IS MINDLESS, MOTIONLESS, BUT WITH SO MUCH RAW POWER LATENT WITHIN HIM...
AND IF OUR DREAM IS FULFILLED, SOON HE WILL--
SOONER, THAN WE PLANNED, BORGO.


HAUPTMANN! WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE NOW?! IF YOU WERE FOLLOWED--
I HAD TO COME! ZORBA HAS DISCOVERED THAT DOOM IS MISSING!
I MUST PERFORM THE OPERATION AT ONCE-- TONIGHT-- BEFORE THEY UNDO ALL OUR PLANS!
IF THIS IS A TRICK--
NO! IT IS TRUE I HAVE REASON TO BOTH HATE AND FEAR DR. DOOM AFTER WHAT HE DID TO MY BROTHER*-- BUT THE FEAR IS STRONGER THAN THE HATE! I MUST SERVE HIM!
IT IS MY DESTINY TO RESURRECT HIM!
*DOOM KILLED HIM BACK IN FANTASTIC FOUR #85-- JIM.
VERY WELL, WE MUST TRUST YOU--YOU ARE THE ONLY MAN IN THE WORLD WHO CAN SUCCEED IN THE TASK!
YES-- BUT FIRST WE MUST RETRIEVE HIS ARMOR. MY EXPERIMENT IS DESIGNED TO--
YES, YES, WE KNOW. I WILL LEAD THE RAID ON THE PALACE PERSONALLY, AS DOOM'S FIRST LIEUTENANT, I KNOW THE SECURITY THERE-- AND HOW TO CIRCUMVENT IT-- BETTER THAN ANYONE.
AND EVEN AS BORGO AND HIS MEN EMBARK ON THEIR FATEFUL MISSION, KING ZORBA TOSSES FITFULLY UNDER ROYAL SILK...
PERHAPS IT IS SIMPLE WORRY AND STRESS, OR EVEN THE FACT THAT THIS BEDCHAMBER ONCE COMFORTED DOOM...
PERHAPS IT IS MERELY THE STORM RAGING WITHOUT...
BUT WHATEVER THE REASON, ZORBA'S ANXIOUS MIND PLAYS HOST TO NIGHTMARES. THEY COME IN A MELANGE OF VIVID FLASHES--THE HELLISH SURGERY PERFORMED ON HIS EYE BY HAUPTMANN'S BROTHER AS PART OF DOOM'S MAD EXPERIMENTS...
...CULMINATING IN THE LEERING, METAL-SHOD VISAGE OF DOOM HIMSELF!
IT IS ENOUGH TO CHILL THE BLOOD...
...AND TO SEAR THE MIND INTO TERRIFIED WAKEFULNESS.
NOOOO!!


J-JUST A DREAM, A NIGHTMARE... BUT SO AWFUL--THE HIDEOUS ATROCITY PERFORMED ON MY EYE BY HAUPTMANN'S BRO--
HAUPTMANN! IT MUST HAVE BEEN HIM! HE KIDNAPED DOOM'S BODY! I WAS A FOOL TO EVER TRUST HIM--A BIGGER FOOL TO LET HIM GO! STILL, EVEN IF DOOM WERE SOMEHOW BROUGHT BACK TO NORMAL--
--HE'D REMAIN POWERLESS WITHOUT HIS...
GOOD LORD! HIS ARMOR! IF THE DOOM LOYALISTS WERE ABLE TO SPIRIT AWAY DOOM HIMSELF--
--SURELY THEY'RE CAPABLE OF ATTEMPTING THE THEFT OF HIS ARMOR, TOO!
THE UNDERGROUND SENSOR CABLES ARE CUT, LT. BORGO.
EXCELLENT--AND THIS MICROWAVE BEAM WILL SHORT OUT THE BACKUP ALARMS INSIDE THE PALACE.
GOT TO GET TO THE ARMOR--BEFORE ANYTHING HAPPENS TO IT!
THERE WILL BE GUARDS STATIONED JUST INSIDE THE DRAWBRIDGE.
TAKE THEM OUT QUIETLY.
IT'S KEPT DOWN HERE IN THE FORMER DUNGEON. THE DOOR'S STILL SEALED--BUT IF LOYALISTS SUCH AS HAUPTMANN HAVE BEEN STATIONED INSIDE THE PALACE, IT PROVES NOTHING!
I MUST SEE THE ARMOR MYSELF!

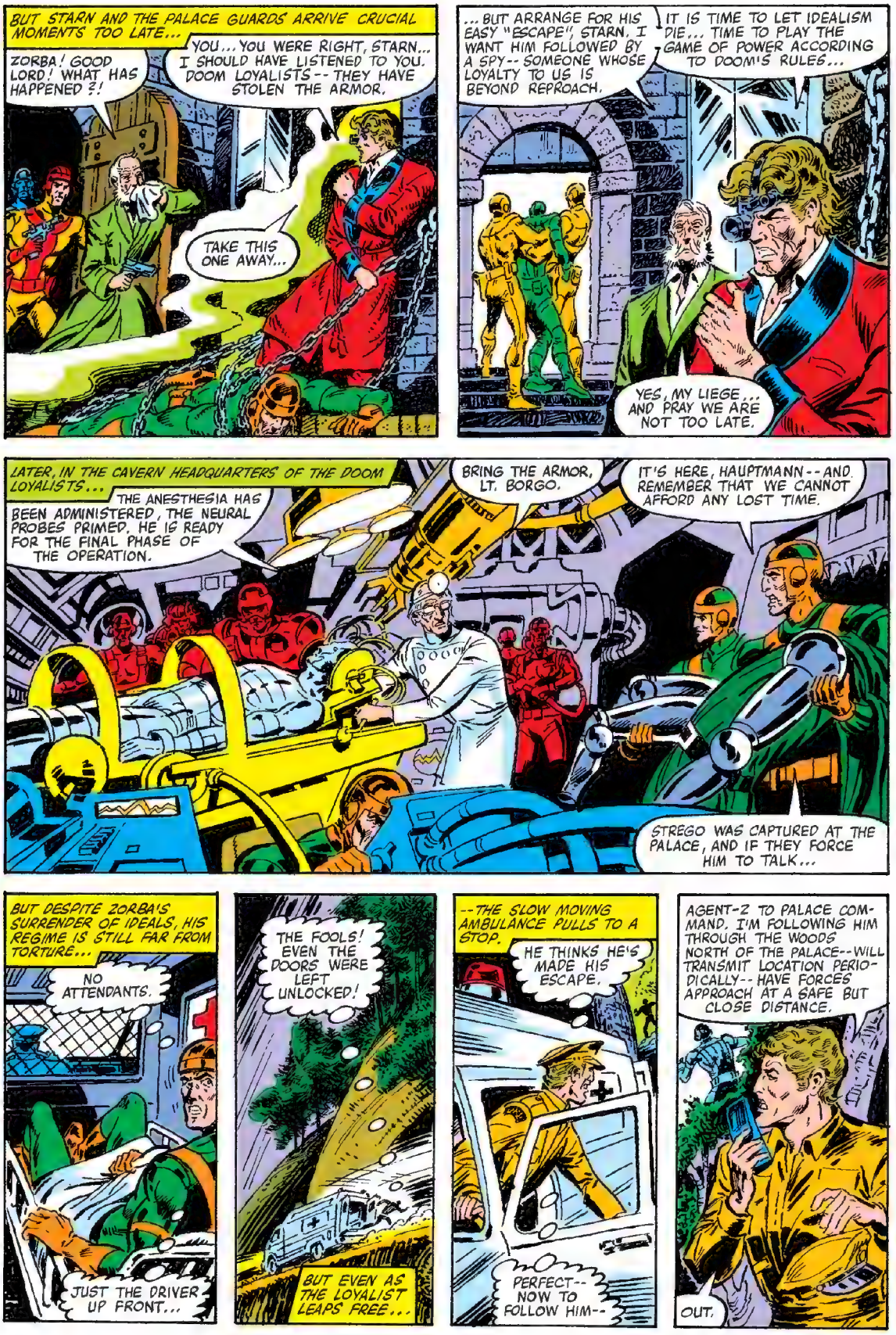

QUICKLY, NOW-- TO THE OLD DUNGEON!
SWAK
CHUD
WUMP
YES! IT'S STILL HERE! THE ARMOR IS STILL SAFELY LOCKED IN THE DISPLAY CAGE!
AND A GREATER RELIEF NO MAN HAS EVER KNOWN...
...FOR, SHOULD THE POWER OF THIS DEMONIC ARMOR EVER FALL INTO THE WRONG HANDS--
FWUMP
EH--?!

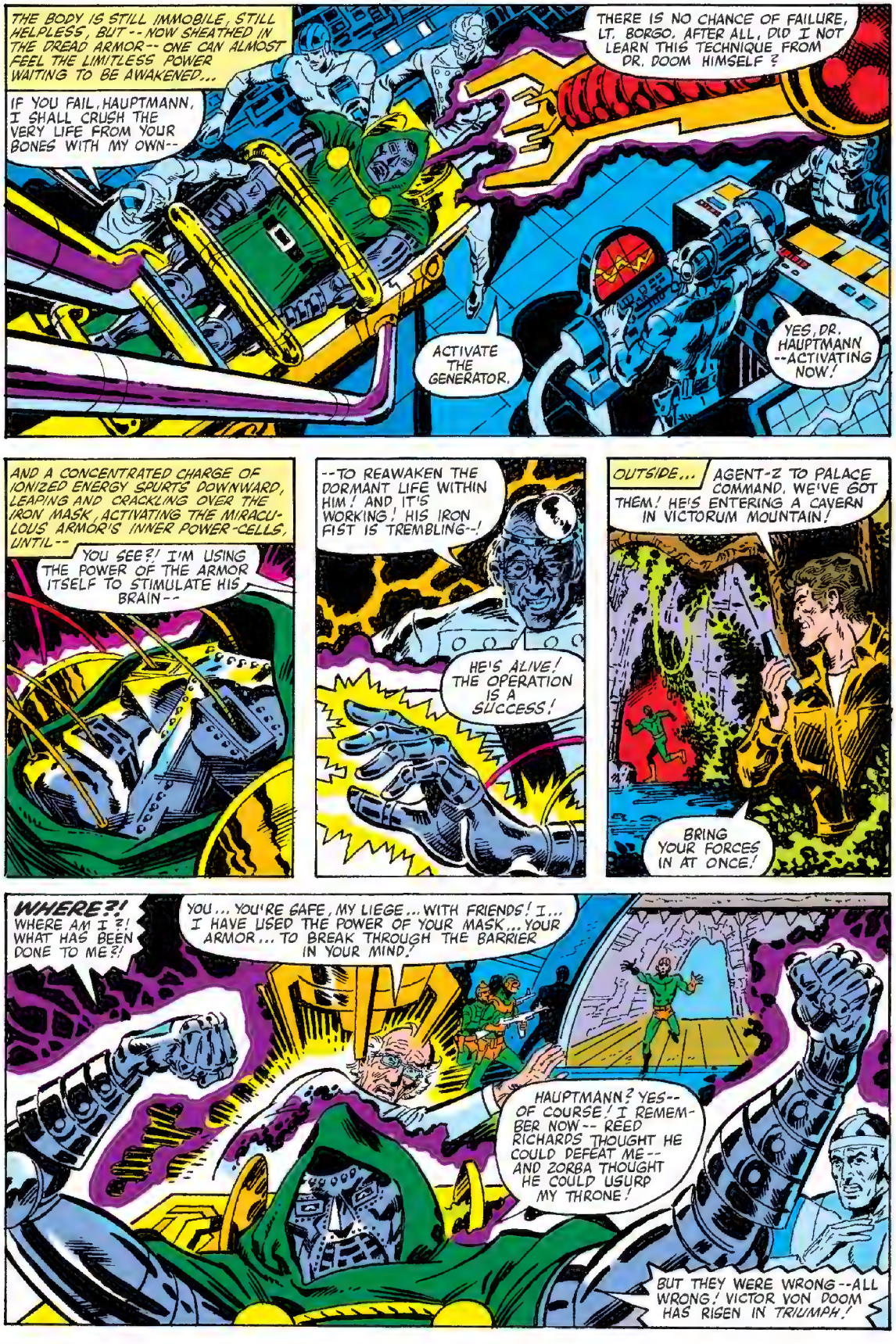
WRONG, ZORBA, YOU PITIFUL FOOL! THE ARMOR WILL SOON FALL INTO THE RIGHT HANDS--VICTOR VON DOOM'S HANDS!
GAS--! CAN'T BREATHE!
KOFF KOFF!

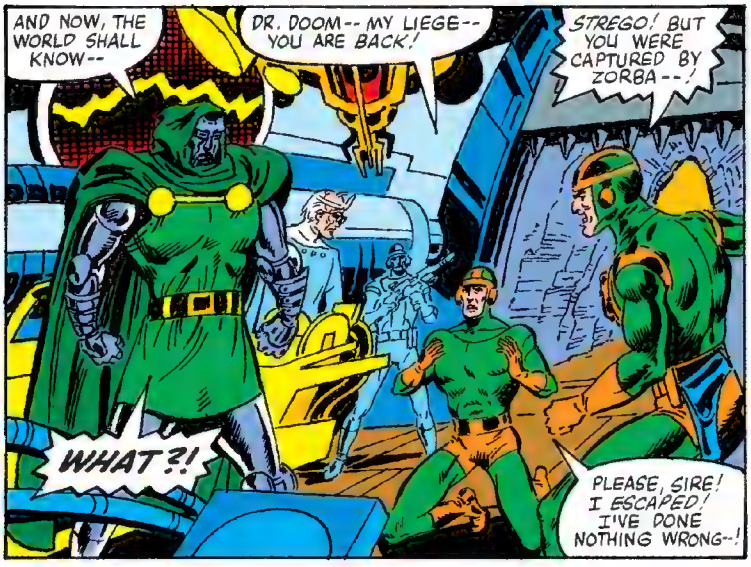

THE LUCITE DISPLAY CASE IS SHATTERED, AND BORGO'S MEN QUICKLY EXTRACT THE PRECIOUS ARMOR. BUT AS THEY HEAD FOR THE DOOR, ZORBA FIGHTS HIS WAY THROUGH THE GASEOUS HAZE--FINALLY MANAGING TO BELLOW THE ALARM...
GUARDS! TO THE DUNGEON! DO YOU HEAR ME?! STARN! WHERE ARE YOU, STARN?
SILENCE HIM!

NOW COME! BRING THE ARMOR!
BRAM
AGH-H! MY ARM--!
NO! GOT TO STOP THEM--!

SOMEHOW... GOT TO STOP AT LEAST ONE OF THEM...!
AUGH-H!
LEAVE HIM! THE GUARDS WILL BE HERE ANY MINUTE!

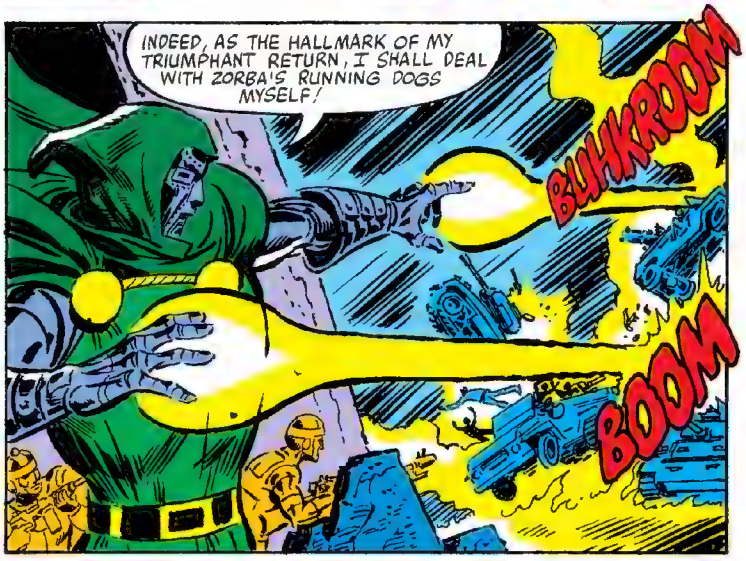

BUT STARN AND THE PALACE GUARDS ARRIVE CRUCIAL MOMENTS TOO LATE...
ZORBA! GOOD LORD! WHAT HAS HAPPENED?!
YOU... YOU WERE RIGHT, STARN... I SHOULD HAVE LISTENED TO YOU. DOOM LOYALISTS -- THEY HAVE STOLEN THE ARMOR.
TAKE THIS ONE AWAY...
...BUT ARRANGE FOR HIS EASY "ESCAPE", STARN. I WANT HIM FOLLOWED BY A SPY -- SOMEONE WHOSE LOYALTY TO US IS BEYOND REPROACH.
IT IS TIME TO LET IDEALISM DIE... TIME TO PLAY THE GAME OF POWER ACCORDING TO DOOM'S RULES...
YES, MY LIEGE... AND PRAY WE ARE NOT TOO LATE.
LATER, IN THE CAVERN HEADQUARTERS OF THE DOOM LOYALISTS...
THE ANESTHESIA HAS BEEN ADMINISTERED, THE NEURAL PROBES PRIMED. HE IS READY FOR THE FINAL PHASE OF THE OPERATION.
BRING THE ARMOR, LT. BORGO.
IT'S HERE, HAUPTMANN -- AND REMEMBER THAT WE CANNOT AFFORD ANY LOST TIME.
STREGO WAS CAPTURED AT THE PALACE, AND IF THEY FORCE HIM TO TALK...
BUT DESPITE ZORBA'S SURRENDER OF IDEALS, HIS REGIME IS STILL FAR FROM TORTURE...
NO ATTENDANTS.
JUST THE DRIVER UP FRONT...
THE FOOLS! EVEN THE DOORS WERE LEFT UNLOCKED!
BUT EVEN AS THE LOYALIST LEAPS FREE...
--THE SLOW MOVING AMBULANCE PULLS TO A STOP.
HE THINKS HE'S MADE HIS ESCAPE.
PERFECT -- NOW TO FOLLOW HIM--
AGENT-Z TO PALACE COMMAND. I'M FOLLOWING HIM THROUGH THE WOODS NORTH OF THE PALACE -- WILL TRANSMIT LOCATION PERIODICALLY -- HAVE FORCES APPROACH AT A SAFE BUT CLOSE DISTANCE.
OUT.


THE BODY IS STILL IMMOBILE, STILL HELPLESS, BUT -- NOW SHEATHED IN THE DREAD ARMOR -- ONE CAN ALMOST FEEL THE LIMITLESS POWER WAITING TO BE AWAKENED...
IF YOU FAIL, HAUPTMANN, I SHALL CRUSH THE VERY LIFE FROM YOUR BONES WITH MY OWN--
THERE IS NO CHANCE OF FAILURE, LT. BORGO, AFTER ALL, DID I NOT LEARN THIS TECHNIQUE FROM DR. DOOM HIMSELF ?
ACTIVATE THE GENERATOR.
YES, DR. HAUPTMANN --ACTIVATING NOW!
AND A CONCENTRATED CHARGE OF IONIZED ENERGY SPURTS DOWNWARD, LEAPING AND CRACKLING OVER THE IRON MASK, ACTIVATING THE MIRACULOUS ARMOR'S INNER POWER-CELLS, UNTIL--
YOU SEE?! I'M USING THE POWER OF THE ARMOR ITSELF TO STIMULATE HIS BRAIN--
--TO REAWAKEN THE DORMANT LIFE WITHIN HIM! AND, IT'S WORKING! HIS IRON FIST IS TREMBLING--!
HE'S ALIVE! THE OPERATION IS A SUCCESS!
OUTSIDE...
AGENT-Z TO PALACE COMMAND. WE'VE GOT THEM! HE'S ENTERING A CAVERN IN VICTORUM MOUNTAIN!
BRING YOUR FORCES IN AT ONCE!
WHERE?! WHERE AM I?! WHAT HAS BEEN DONE TO ME?!
YOU... YOU'RE SAFE, MY LIEGE... WITH FRIENDS! I... I HAVE USED THE POWER OF YOUR MASK... YOUR ARMOR... TO BREAK THROUGH THE BARRIER IN YOUR MIND!
HAUPTMANN? YES-- OF COURSE! I REMEMBER NOW -- REED RICHARDS THOUGHT HE COULD DEFEAT ME -- AND ZORBA THOUGHT HE COULD USURP MY THRONE!
BUT THEY WERE WRONG--ALL WRONG! VICTOR VON DOOM HAS RISEN IN TRIUMPH!

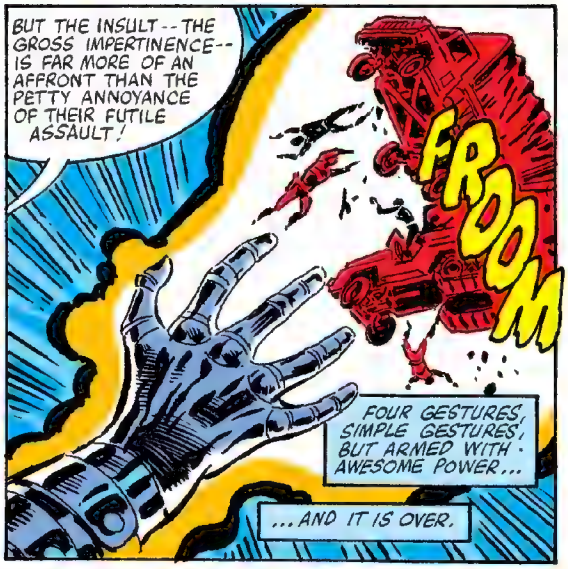

AND NOW, THE WORLD SHALL KNOW--
DR. DOOM--MY LIEGE--YOU ARE BACK!
STREGO! BUT YOU WERE CAPTURED BY ZORBA--!
WHAT?!
PLEASE, SIRE! I ESCAPED! I'VE DONE NOTHING WRONG--!

"NOTHING WRONG"?! CRAVEN DOLT! NOTHING BUT PROVIDED MY ENEMIES WITH THE MEANS TO DISCOVER US!
BZZAMM

MEN COMING--ZORBA'S FORCES! TO BATTLE STATIONS--PROTECT THE MASTER WITH YOUR LIVES!
STAND ASIDE, FOOLS! DR. DOOM NEEDS NO PROTECTION!


INDEED, AS THE HALLMARK OF MY TRIUMPHANT RETURN, I SHALL DEAL WITH ZORBA'S RUNNING DOGS MYSELF!
BUHKROOM
BOOM

THEY COME AT ME WITH MY OWN WEAPONS--WEARING THE UNIFORMS OF MY FORMER ARMY--HOPING TO SLAY ME!
FZHAMM


BUT THE INSULT--THE GROSS IMPERTINENCE--IS FAR MORE OF AN AFFRONT THAN THE PETTY ANNOYANCE OF THEIR FUTILE ASSAULT!
FROOM
FOUR GESTURES, SIMPLE GESTURES, BUT ARMED WITH AWESOME POWER...
...AND IT IS OVER.

WITH THE ENTIRE FORCE ROUTED OR DESTROYED, ZORBA AND STARN ARE FORCED TO FLEE...
RUN, FOOLS! RUN WHILE YOU CAN!
BUT YOU'LL SOON LEARN THAT YOU CAN NEVER OUTRUN THE FULL FURY OF VICTOR VON DOOM!
HE IS THE DEVIL, ZORBA--THE DEVIL HIMSELF!
HE WATCHES A MOMENT, A GRIM FIGURE UNDER LOWERING SKIES, THEN PIVOTS TO STRIDE FORCEFULLY INTO THE DIN OF SPONTANEOUS CHEERS...
HAIL DOOM! LONG LIVE DOOM!
ONLY BORIS REMAINS SILENT, SHOULDERS STOOPED, WATCHING WITH A TRAGIC MIX OF EMOTIONS...
INSIDE, THE FORMER LATVERIAN MONARCH ACTS QUICKLY, DECISIVELY, HIS METAL-ECHOED WORDS CRISP AND AUTHORITATIVE...
LOCATE A NEW HEADQUARTERS AND MAINTAIN YOUR WORK.
SPREAD THE WORD OF MY PENDING RETURN TO FULL POWER. GATHER ALL THE SUPPORT YOU CAN AND STAND READY WITH IT FOR THE FATEFUL DAY.
IN THE MEANTIME, I HAVE MUCH TO DO PERSONALLY, MUCH TO PREPARE.
FOR WHEN VICTOR VON DOOM FINALLY AND RIGHTFULLY RETURNS TO HIS CHOSEN THRONE, ALL OF LATVERIA WILL KNOW IT IS FOREVER-- AND ALL OF THE WORLD SHALL TREMBLE IN FEAR!
NEVER AGAIN SHALL DR. DOOM COUNTENANCE THE SPECTER OF DEFEAT! MY VAST AND SUPREME WILL SHALL BE DONE!
AND AS THE DARK FIGURE SOARS OFF INTO THE DISTANT SKY, HIS FINAL WORDS STILL REVERBERATING ON THE HEAVY AIR, AN OLD MAN NAMED BORIS SOLEMNLY WALKS AWAY. HE SIGHS WEAKLY, THEN GROANS. IT IS A DEEP GROAN... A RAGGED GASPING BREATH BESPEAKING THE TRAGEDY FOUND ONLY IN VICTORY AND DEFEAT COMBINED.
THE OIL IN HIS LANTERN IS LOW. THE FLAME GUTTERS, FLICKERS, AND THREATENS TO FADE...
END

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THE WORLD'S GREATEST COMIC MAGAZINE!
Fantastic Four®
PRISONERS OF THE SPACE-GODS!
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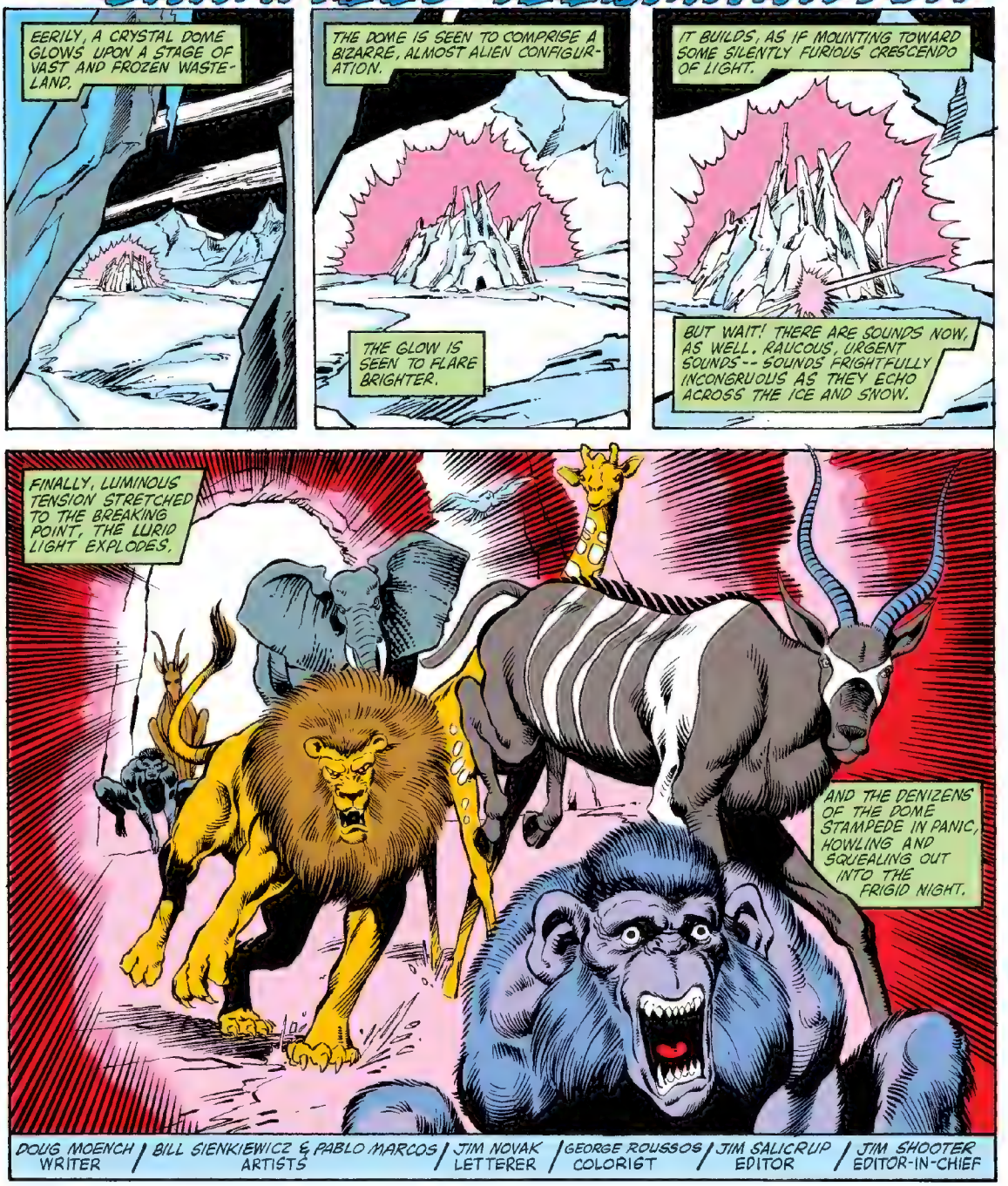
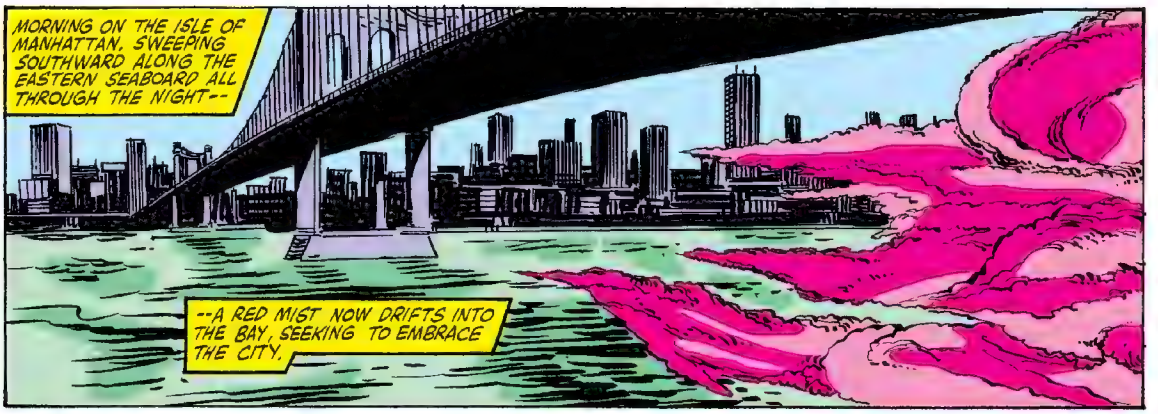
Reed Richards! Ben Grimm! Sue Richards! Johnny Storm! Together they braved the unknown terrors of outer space and were changed into something more than human! MR. FANTASTIC! THE THING! THE INVISIBLE GIRL! THE HUMAN TORCH! And now the world will never again be the same!

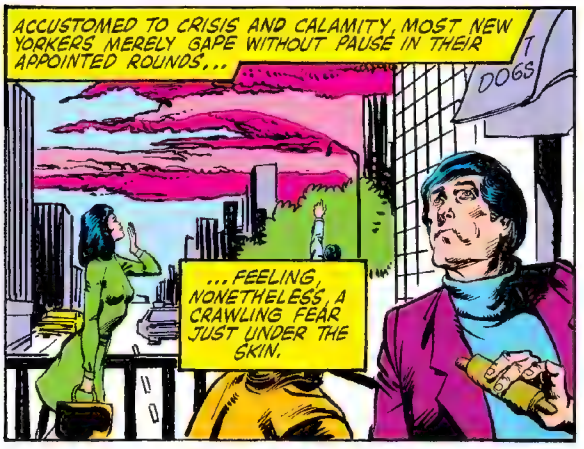
Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE FANTASTIC FOUR!®

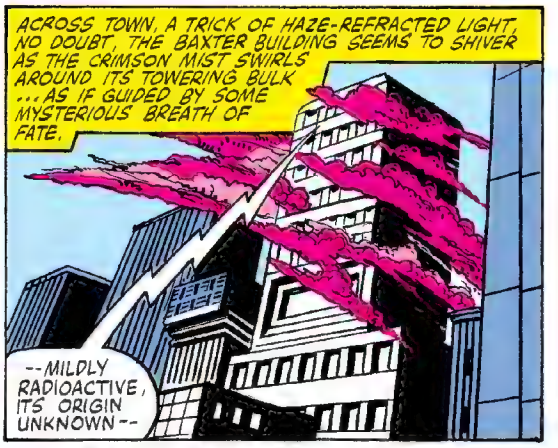
THE DARKFIELD ILLUMINATION


EERILY, A CRYSTAL DOME GLOWS UPON A STAGE OF VAST AND FROZEN WASTE-LAND.
THE DOME IS SEEN TO COMPRISE A BIZARRE, ALMOST ALIEN CONFIGUR-ATION.
THE GLOW IS SEEN TO FLARE BRIGHTER.
IT BUILDS, AS IF MOUNTING TOWARD SOME SILENTLY FURIOUS CRESCENDO OF LIGHT.
BUT WAIT! THERE ARE SOUNDS NOW, AS WELL. RAUCOUS, URGENT SOUNDS -- SOUNDS FRIGHTFULLY INCONGRUOUS AS THEY ECHO ACROSS THE ICE AND SNOW.
FINALLY, LUMINOUS TENSION STRETCHED TO THE BREAKING POINT, THE LURID LIGHT EXPLODES,
AND THE DENIZENS OF THE DOME STAMPEDE IN PANIC, HOWLING AND SQUEALING OUT INTO THE FRIGID NIGHT.

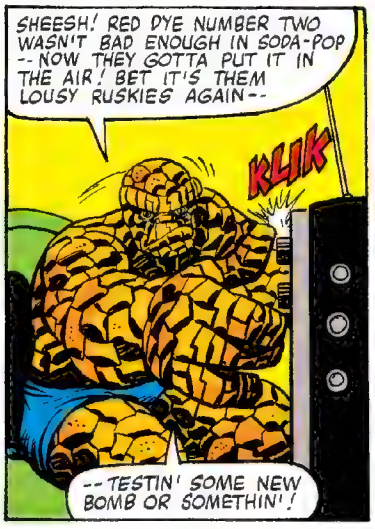
DOUG MOENCH WRITER / BILL SIENKIEWICZ & PABLO MARCOS ARTISTS / JIM NOVAK LETTERER / GEORGE ROUSSOS COLORIST / JIM SALICRUP EDITOR / JIM SHOOTER EDITOR-IN-CHIEF


MORNING ON THE ISLE OF MANHATTAN, SWEEPING SOUTHWARD ALONG THE EASTERN SEABOARD ALL THROUGH THE NIGHT--
--A RED MIST NOW DRIFTS INTO THE BAY, SEEKING TO EMBRACE THE CITY.


ACCUSTOMED TO CRISIS AND CALAMITY, MOST NEW YORKERS MERELY GAPE WITHOUT PAUSE IN THEIR APPOINTED ROUNDS...
DOGS
...FEELING, NONETHELESS, A CRAWLING FEAR JUST UNDER THE SKIN.

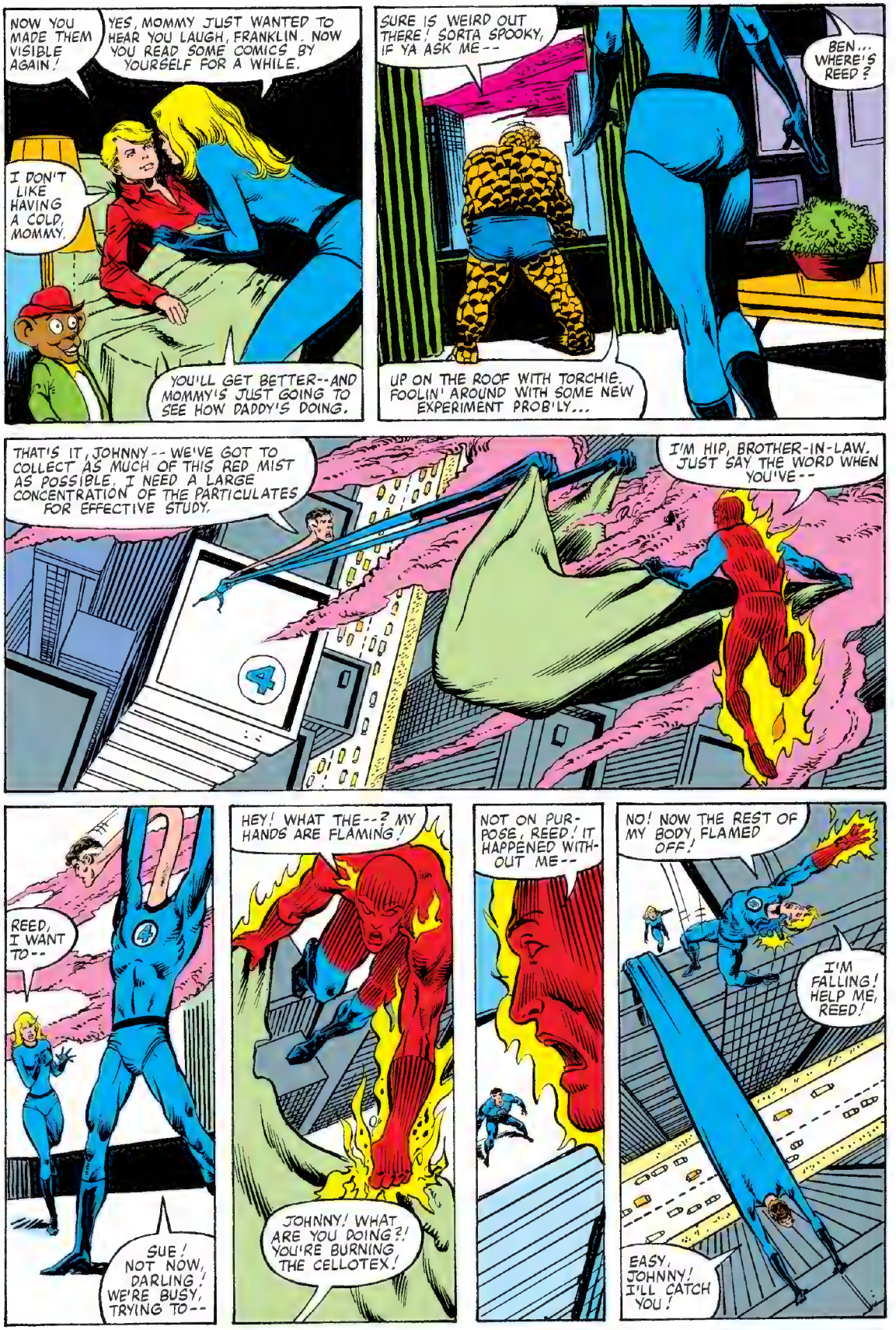

ACROSS TOWN, A TRICK OF HAZE-REFRACTED LIGHT, NO DOUBT, THE BAXTER BUILDING SEEMS TO SHIVER AS THE CRIMSON MIST SWIRLS AROUND ITS TOWERING BULK ...AS IF GUIDED BY SOME MYSTERIOUS BREATH OF FATE.
--MILDLY RADIOACTIVE, ITS ORIGIN UNKNOWN--

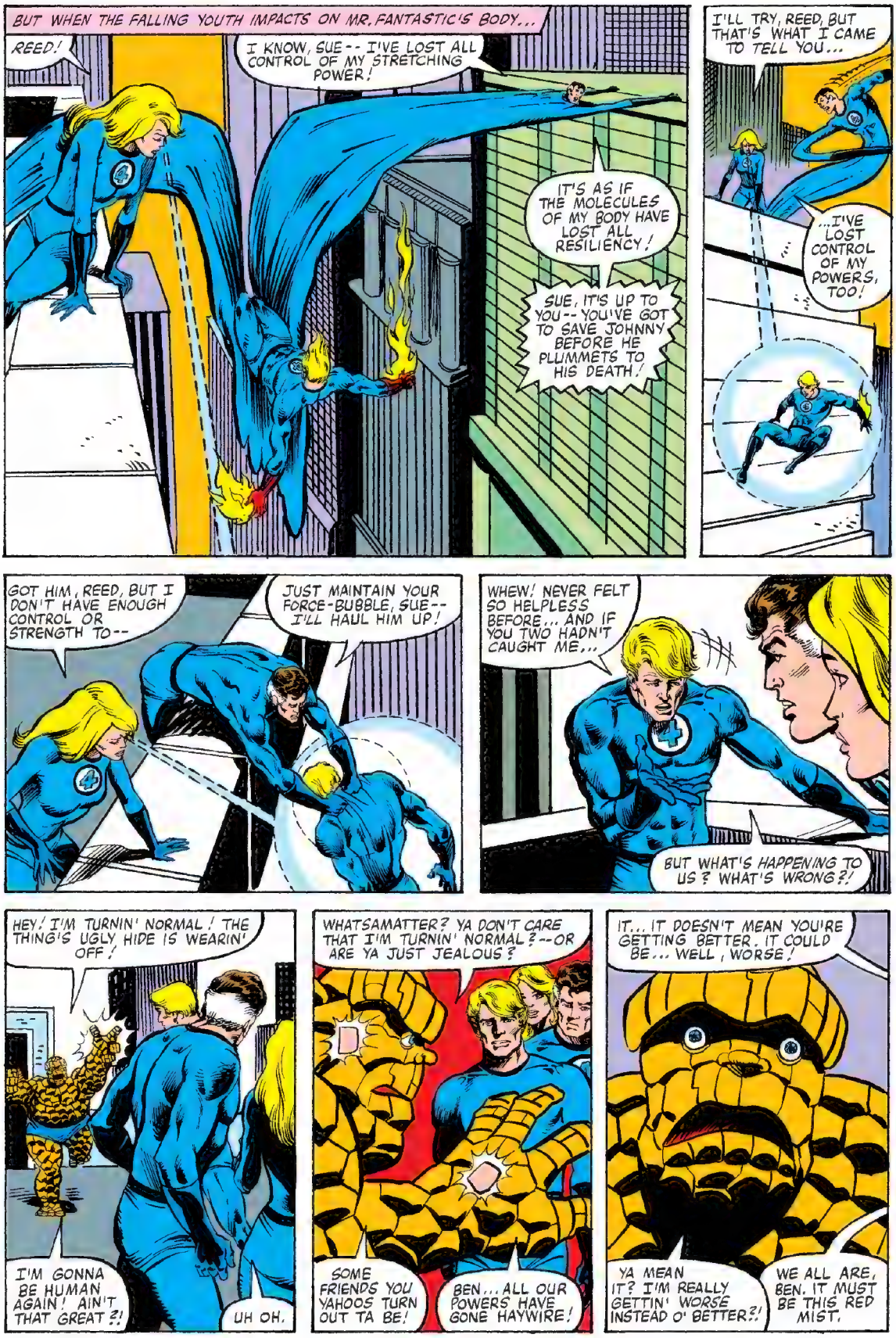
-- BUT AUTHORITIES SPECULATE THAT IT IS SOMEHOW RELATED TO THE STRANGE "EXPLOSION" DETECTED BY SATELLITE RADAR LAST NIGHT NEAR THE NORTH POLE.
AUTHORITIES ALSO HASTEN TO ADD, HOWEVER THAT THE INEXPLICABLE RED MIST POSES NO DANGER TO NORMAL HEALTH--
HMPH! MUST BE FIRST-COUSIN TO THE GOOP THEY'RE PUMPIN' OUTTA THREE MILE ISLAND.

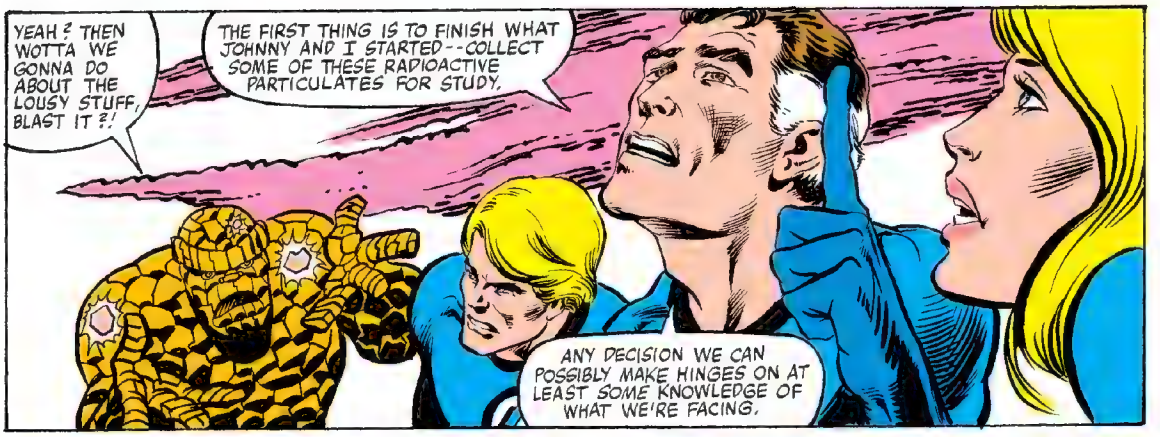

SHEESH! RED DYE NUMBER TWO WASN'T BAD ENOUGH IN SODA-POP --NOW THEY GOTTA PUT IT IN THE AIR! BET IT'S THEM LOUSY RUSKIES AGAIN--
KLIK
--TESTIN' SOME NEW BOMB OR SOMETHIN'!

--AND THEN FRENCHIE COMES DOWN WITH THE HELI-COPTER TO--
ULK
MOON KNIGHT
--RESCUE MOON KNIGHT, MOMMY?
YOU MUST HAVE PEEKED, FRANKLIN. GUESS I DON'T HAVE TO SHOW YOU THE PIC--

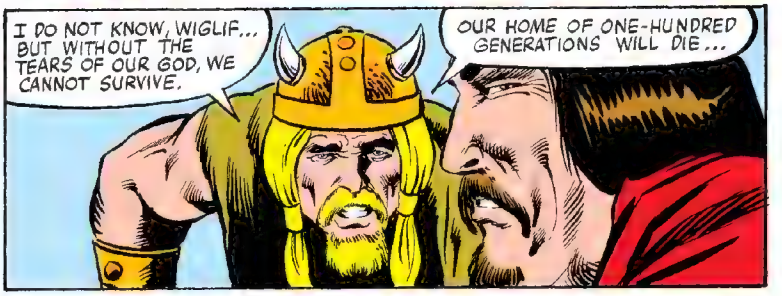
HEY, NEATO, MOMMY-- YOU MADE YOUR LEGS GO INVISIBLE! MOON KNIGHT CAN'T DO THAT!
NOR DID I MEAN TO! BUT I DON'T WANT TO ALARM FRANKLIN...
4

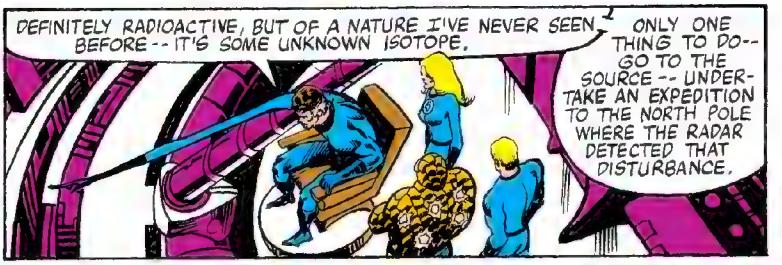

NOW YOU MADE THEM VISIBLE AGAIN!
YES, MOMMY JUST WANTED TO HEAR YOU LAUGH, FRANKLIN. NOW YOU READ SOME COMICS BY YOURSELF FOR A WHILE.
I DON'T LIKE HAVING A COLD, MOMMY.
YOU'LL GET BETTER--AND MOMMY'S JUST GOING TO SEE HOW DADDY'S DOING.
SURE IS WEIRD OUT THERE! SORTA SPOOKY, IF YA ASK ME--
BEN... WHERE'S REED?
UP ON THE ROOF WITH TORCHIE. FOOLIN' AROUND WITH SOME NEW EXPERIMENT PROB'LY...
THAT'S IT, JOHNNY--WE'VE GOT TO COLLECT AS MUCH OF THIS RED MIST AS POSSIBLE. I NEED A LARGE CONCENTRATION OF THE PARTICULATES FOR EFFECTIVE STUDY.
I'M HIP, BROTHER-IN-LAW. JUST SAY THE WORD WHEN YOU'VE--
REED, I WANT TO--
SUE! NOT NOW, DARLING! WE'RE BUSY, TRYING TO--
HEY! WHAT THE--? MY HANDS ARE FLAMING!
JOHNNY! WHAT ARE YOU DOING?! YOU'RE BURNING THE CELLOTEX!
NOT ON PURPOSE, REED! IT HAPPENED WITHOUT ME--
NO! NOW THE REST OF MY BODY FLAMED OFF!
I'M FALLING! HELP ME, REED!
EASY, JOHNNY! I'LL CATCH YOU!

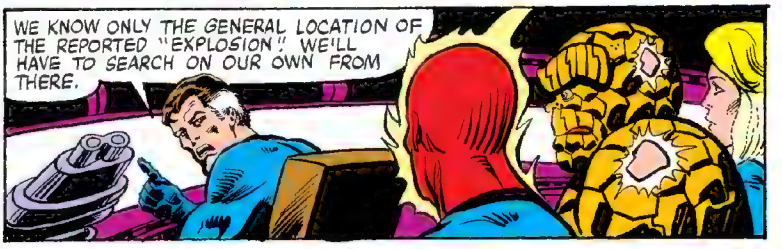

BUT WHEN THE FALLING YOUTH IMPACTS ON MR. FANTASTIC'S BODY...
REED!
I KNOW, SUE -- I'VE LOST ALL CONTROL OF MY STRETCHING POWER!
IT'S AS IF THE MOLECULES OF MY BODY HAVE LOST ALL RESILIENCY!
SUE, IT'S UP TO YOU -- YOU'VE GOT TO SAVE JOHNNY BEFORE HE PLUMMETS TO HIS DEATH!
I'LL TRY, REED, BUT THAT'S WHAT I CAME TO TELL YOU...
...I'VE LOST CONTROL OF MY POWERS, TOO!
GOT HIM, REED, BUT I DON'T HAVE ENOUGH CONTROL OR STRENGTH TO--
JUST MAINTAIN YOUR FORCE-BUBBLE, SUE -- I'LL HAUL HIM UP!
WHEW! NEVER FELT SO HELPLESS BEFORE... AND IF YOU TWO HADN'T CAUGHT ME...
BUT WHAT'S HAPPENING TO US? WHAT'S WRONG?!
HEY! I'M TURNIN' NORMAL! THE THING'S UGLY HIDE IS WEARIN' OFF!
I'M GONNA BE HUMAN AGAIN! AIN'T THAT GREAT?!
UH OH.
WHATSAMATTER? YA DON'T CARE THAT I'M TURNIN' NORMAL? -- OR ARE YA JUST JEALOUS?
SOME FRIENDS YOU YAHOOS TURN OUT TA BE!
BEN... ALL OUR POWERS HAVE GONE HAYWIRE!
IT... IT DOESN'T MEAN YOU'RE GETTING BETTER. IT COULD BE... WELL, WORSE!
YA MEAN IT? I'M REALLY GETTIN' WORSE INSTEAD O' BETTER?!
WE ALL ARE, BEN. IT MUST BE THIS RED MIST.

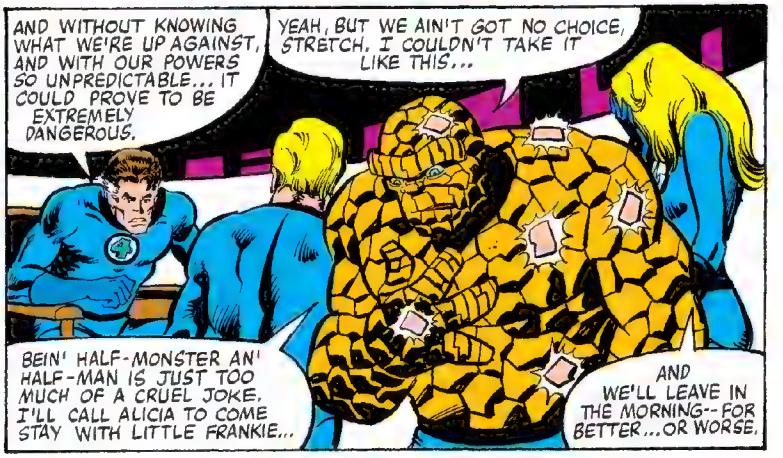

YEAH? THEN WOTTA WE GONNA DO ABOUT THE LOUSY STUFF, BLAST IT?!
THE FIRST THING IS TO FINISH WHAT JOHNNY AND I STARTED--COLLECT SOME OF THESE RADIOACTIVE PARTICULATES FOR STUDY.
ANY DECISION WE CAN POSSIBLY MAKE HINGES ON AT LEAST SOME KNOWLEDGE OF WHAT WE'RE FACING.

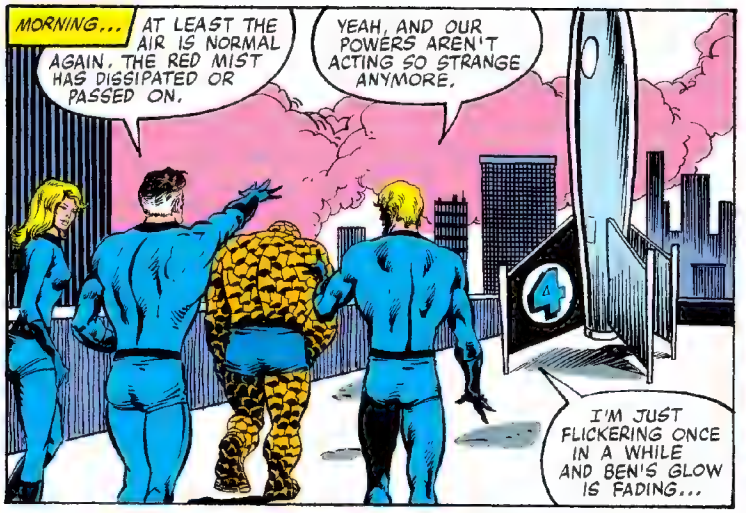
ELSEWHERE...
HE IS WORSE, WIGLIF.
YES, KORGON IS DYING--UNDOUBTEDLY DUE TO SOME TREACHERY FROM THE OUTER WORLD! WE MUST DO SOMETHING, HROLF... BUT, WHAT?


I DO NOT KNOW, WIGLIF... BUT WITHOUT THE TEARS OF OUR GOD, WE CANNOT SURVIVE.
OUR HOME OF ONE-HUNDRED GENERATIONS WILL DIE...

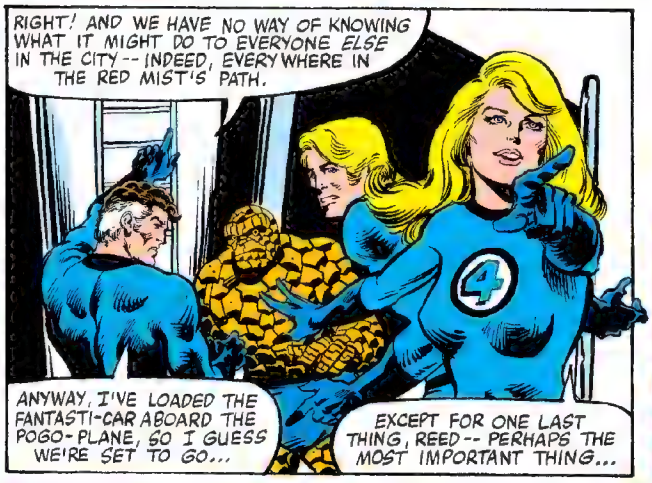

DEFINITELY RADIOACTIVE, BUT OF A NATURE I'VE NEVER SEEN BEFORE--IT'S SOME UNKNOWN ISOTOPE.
ONLY ONE THING TO DO--GO TO THE SOURCE--UNDERTAKE AN EXPEDITION TO THE NORTH POLE WHERE THE RADAR DETECTED THAT DISTURBANCE.

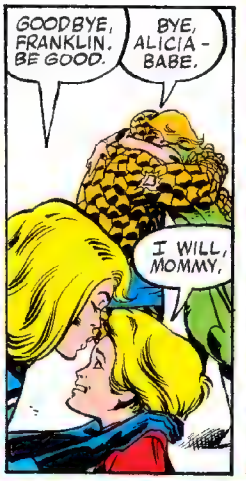

WE KNOW ONLY THE GENERAL LOCATION OF THE REPORTED "EXPLOSION"! WE'LL HAVE TO SEARCH ON OUR OWN FROM THERE.

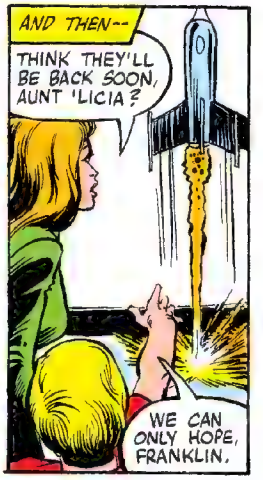

AND WITHOUT KNOWING WHAT WE'RE UP AGAINST, AND WITH OUR POWERS SO UNPREDICTABLE... IT COULD PROVE TO BE EXTREMELY DANGEROUS.
YEAH, BUT WE AIN'T GOT NO CHOICE, STRETCH. I COULDN'T TAKE IT LIKE THIS...
BEIN' HALF-MONSTER AN' HALF-MAN IS JUST TOO MUCH OF A CRUEL JOKE. I'LL CALL ALICIA TO COME STAY WITH LITTLE FRANKIE...
AND WE'LL LEAVE IN THE MORNING--FOR BETTER...OR WORSE.

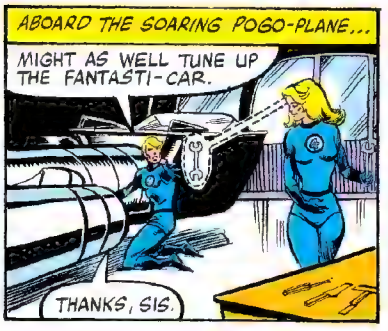

MORNING...
AT LEAST THE AIR IS NORMAL AGAIN. THE RED MIST HAS DISSIPATED OR PASSED ON.
YEAH, AND OUR POWERS AREN'T ACTING SO STRANGE ANYMORE.
I'M JUST FLICKERING ONCE IN A WHILE AND BEN'S GLOW IS FADING...

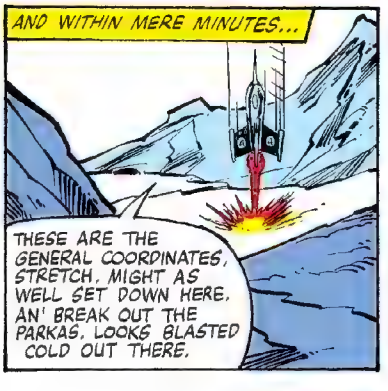
ARE YOU SAYING YOU WANT TO CALL IT OFF, JOHNNY -- JUST WAIT AND SEE IF THE EFFECTS COMPLETELY WEAR OFF?
NO. IF THERE'S A MYSTERY, SIS, WE OUGHT TO SOLVE IT. BESIDES, THERE'S NO TELLING WHAT'LL HAPPEN IN THE FUTURE.
THE AFTER-EFFECTS COULD BE EVEN WORSE.

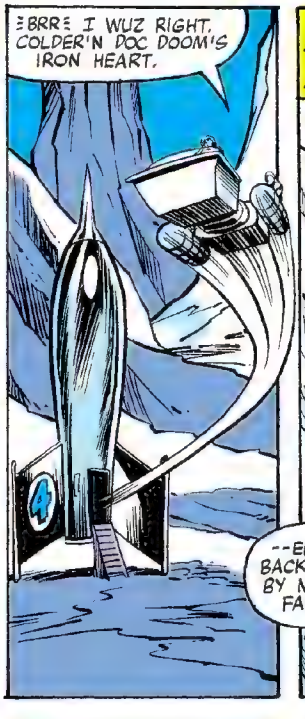

RIGHT! AND WE HAVE NO WAY OF KNOWING WHAT IT MIGHT DO TO EVERYONE ELSE IN THE CITY -- INDEED, EVERYWHERE IN THE RED MIST'S PATH.
ANYWAY, I'VE LOADED THE FANTASTI-CAR ABOARD THE POGO-PLANE, SO I GUESS WE'RE SET TO GO...
EXCEPT FOR ONE LAST THING, REED -- PERHAPS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING...

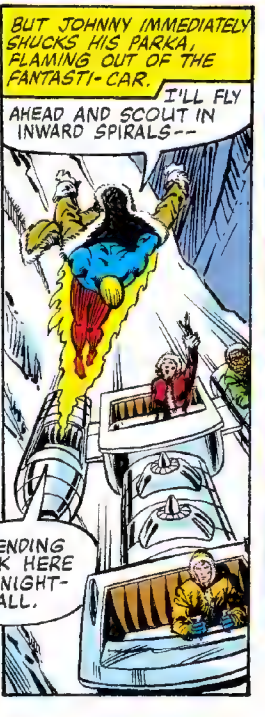

GOODBYE, FRANKLIN. BE GOOD.
BYE, ALICIA - BABE.
I WILL, MOMMY.

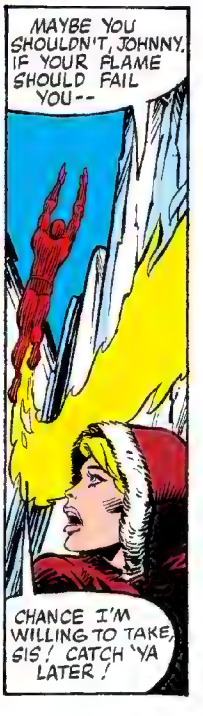

AND THEN--
THINK THEY'LL BE BACK SOON, AUNT 'LICIA?
WE CAN ONLY HOPE, FRANKLIN.

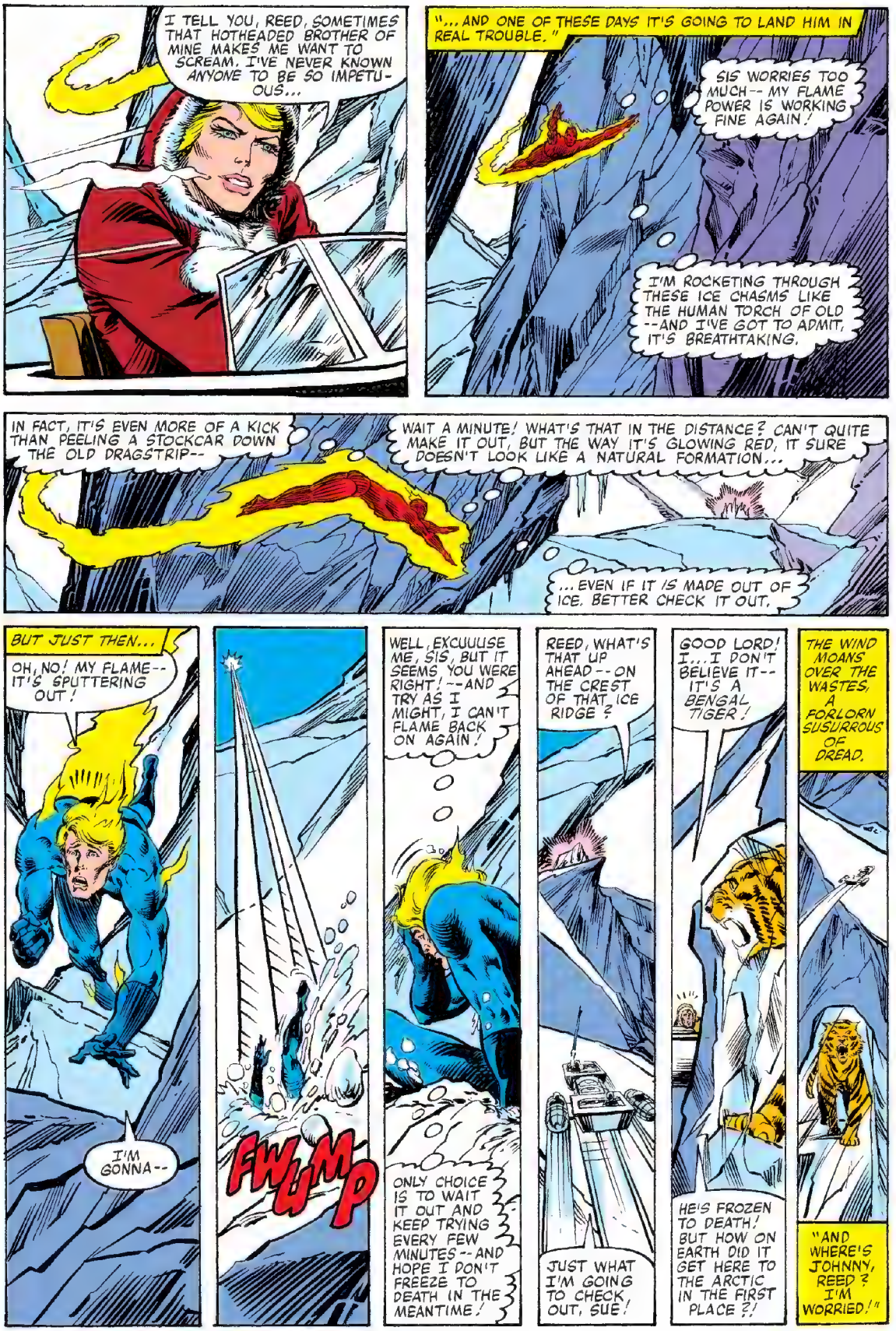

ABOARD THE SOARING POGO-PLANE...
MIGHT AS WELL TUNE UP THE FANTASTI-CAR.
THANKS, SIS.


AND WITHIN MERE MINUTES...
THESE ARE THE GENERAL COORDINATES, STRETCH. MIGHT AS WELL SET DOWN HERE, AN' BREAK OUT THE PARKAS. LOOKS BLASTED COLD OUT THERE.


BRRR! I WUZ RIGHT. COLDER'N DOC DOOM'S IRON HEART.

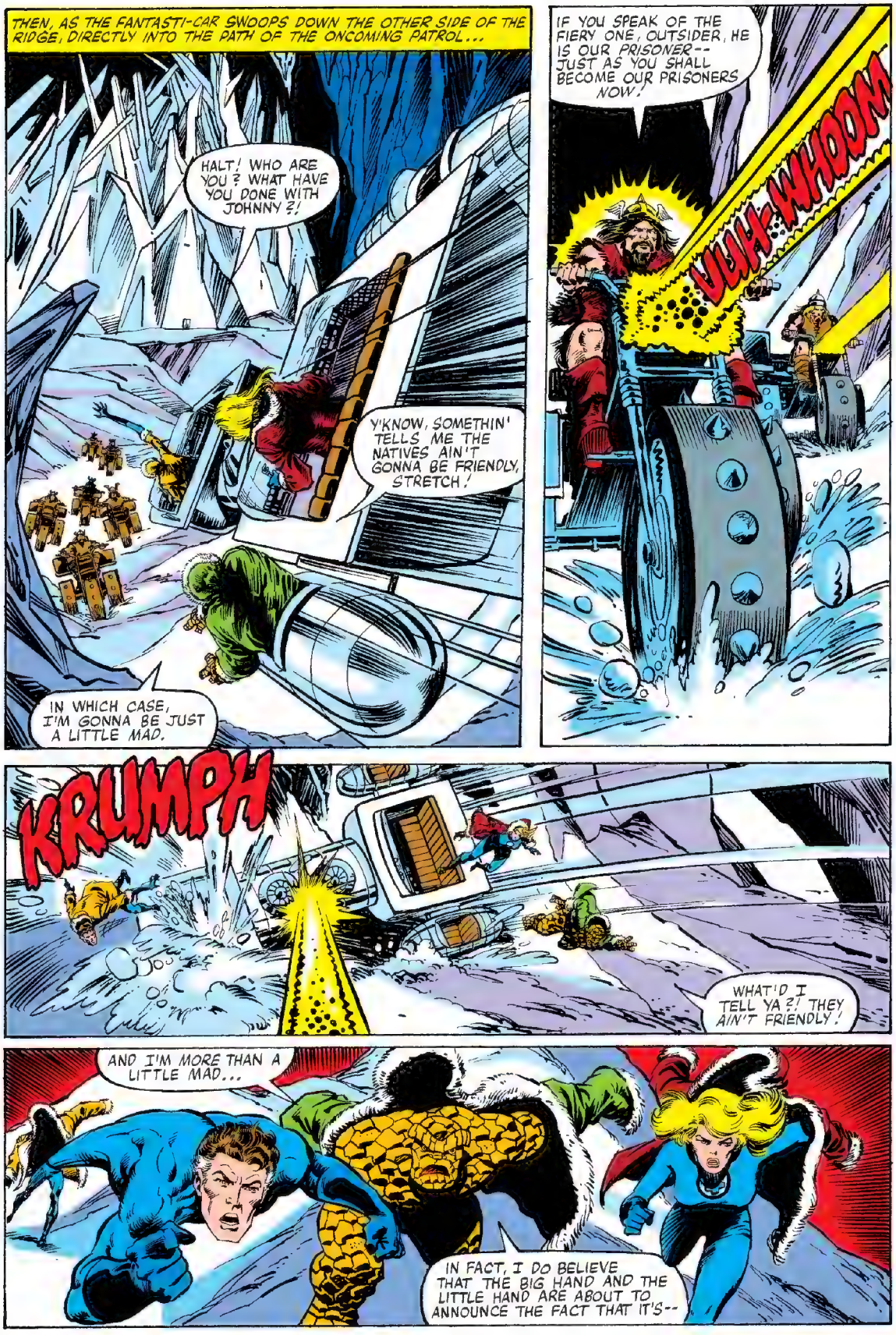

BUT JOHNNY IMMEDIATELY SHUCKS HIS PARKA, FLAMING OUT OF THE FANTASTI-CAR.
I'LL FLY AHEAD AND SCOUT IN INWARD SPIRALS--
--ENDING BACK HERE BY NIGHT-FALL.

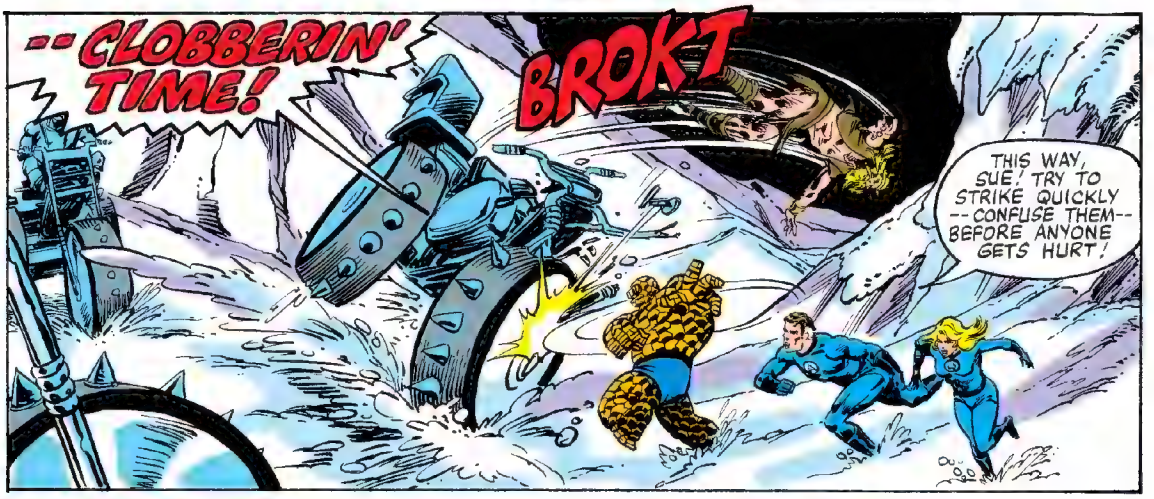

MAYBE YOU SHOULDN'T, JOHNNY. IF YOUR FLAME SHOULD FAIL YOU--
CHANCE I'M WILLING TO TAKE, SIS! CATCH 'YA LATER!

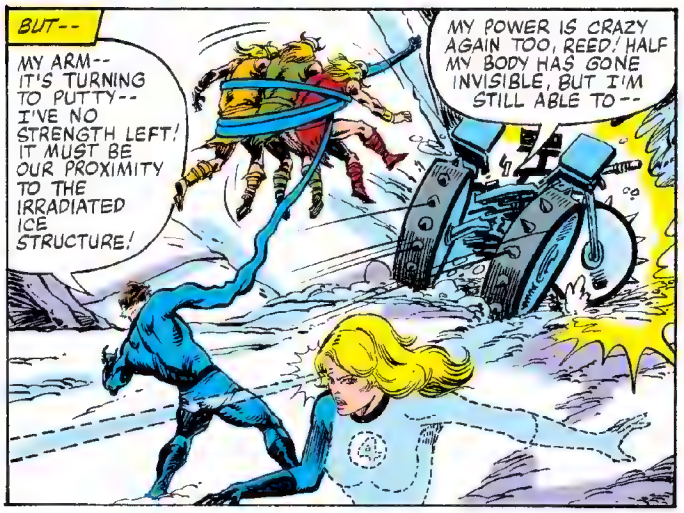

I TELL YOU, REED, SOMETIMES THAT HOTHEADED BROTHER OF MINE MAKES ME WANT TO SCREAM. I'VE NEVER KNOWN ANYONE TO BE SO IMPETUOUS...
"...AND ONE OF THESE DAYS IT'S GOING TO LAND HIM IN REAL TROUBLE."
SIS WORRIES TOO MUCH-- MY FLAME POWER IS WORKING FINE AGAIN!
I'M ROCKETING THROUGH THESE ICE CHASMS LIKE THE HUMAN TORCH OF OLD --AND I'VE GOT TO ADMIT, IT'S BREATHTAKING.
IN FACT, IT'S EVEN MORE OF A KICK THAN PEELING A STOCKCAR DOWN THE OLD DRAGSTRIP--
WAIT A MINUTE! WHAT'S THAT IN THE DISTANCE? CAN'T QUITE MAKE IT OUT, BUT THE WAY IT'S GLOWING RED, IT SURE DOESN'T LOOK LIKE A NATURAL FORMATION...
...EVEN IF IT IS MADE OUT OF ICE. BETTER CHECK IT OUT.
BUT JUST THEN...
OH, NO! MY FLAME-- IT'S SPUTTERING OUT!
I'M GONNA--
FWUMP
WELL, EXCUUUSE ME, SIS, BUT IT SEEMS YOU WERE RIGHT! --AND TRY AS I MIGHT, I CAN'T FLAME BACK ON AGAIN!
ONLY CHOICE IS TO WAIT IT OUT AND KEEP TRYING EVERY FEW MINUTES--AND HOPE I DON'T FREEZE TO DEATH IN THE MEANTIME!
REED, WHAT'S THAT UP AHEAD--ON THE CREST OF THAT ICE RIDGE?
JUST WHAT I'M GOING TO CHECK OUT, SUE!
GOOD LORD! I...I DON'T BELIEVE IT-- IT'S A BENGAL TIGER!
HE'S FROZEN TO DEATH! BUT HOW ON EARTH DID IT GET HERE TO THE ARCTIC IN THE FIRST PLACE?!
THE WIND MOANS OVER THE WASTES, A FORLORN SUSURROUS OF DREAD.
"AND WHERE'S JOHNNY, REED? I'M WORRIED!"

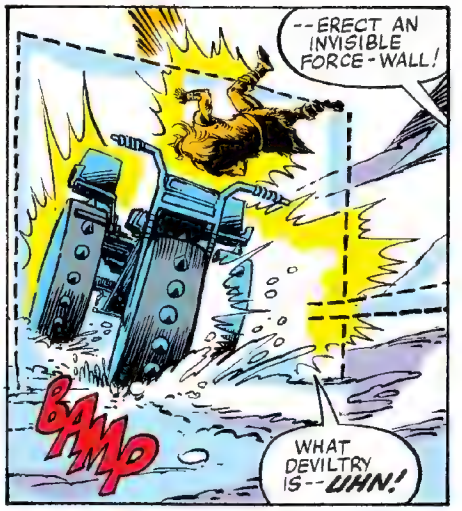
I-I'M FREEZING... AND I S-STILL CAN'T GET MY FLAME TO--
WIGLIF WAS RIGHT.
WHO THE--?! VIKINGS?!
IT WAS THE TREACHEROUS HAND OF THE OUTSIDE WORLD...
AYE, AND IF HE'S RESPONSIBLE FOR WHAT HAPPENED TO OUR GOD--
"GOD"? I...I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT...
BUT YOU'RE NOT TAKING JOHNNY STORM WITHOUT A FIGHT!
STUN HIM!
AGH-H-H!
NOW BIND HIM TO THE CART-- AND WE WILL DRAG HIM BACK.
ZHEOR
AND SO, MINUTES LATER...
I'M STILL STUNNED... THEY SEEM TO BE TAKING ME TOWARD THAT GLOWING FORMATION -- WHICH MEANS I'VE GOT TO ALERT THE OTHERS...
... EVEN IF IT TAKES MORE CONCENTRATION -- MORE WILLPOWER -- THAN I USUALLY NEED FOR A SUPERNOVA BLAST!
GOTTA TRY... EVEN IF IT'S JUST A WEAK FLARE... GOT TO--
VOOOSH
--DO IT!
LOOK! HE IS SOME MANNER OF SORCERER!
THEN HE MUST BE THE ONE RESPONSIBLE!
AYE -- AND ONCE I'VE KNOCKED HIM OUT WITH A STRONGER BLAST, WIGLIF AND HROLF CAN DECIDE WHAT'S TO BE DONE WITH HIM.
ZHEOR

LOOK! A FLARE--!
OR TORCHIE'S FLAME, STRETCH.
WE'VE GOT TO FOLLOW IT, REED! JOHNNY MUST BE IN TROUBLE!
IN SOME KIND OF... CAGE NOW... AND IT... IT'S SUDDENLY HOT!
THE PRISONER IS REVIVING! SEND OUT A PATROL TO SEARCH FOR ANY OTHERS!
IF ANY ARE FOUND, KILL THEM ON SIGHT!
I WILL PERSONALLY SLAY THIS ONE RIGHT NOW!
HOLD, WIGLIF! WHO MADE YOU LEADER? AS LONG AS OUR GOD LIVES, THERE WILL BE NO KILLING UNLESS HE SO COMMANDS.
AND WHEN THE GOD DIES, HROLF...?
IF HE DIES, THEN WE SHALL ALL DECIDE.
MEANWHILE, YOU WOULD HAVE US HELPLESSLY AWAIT AN ATTACK BY OTHERS WHO CAN EMIT FIRE FROM THEIR FLESH?
NO, THE IDEA OF A PATROL IS A GOOD ONE.
GO OUT AND SEARCH, BROTHERS -- BUT ONLY TO TAKE PRISONERS, NOT TO KILL!
GET READY, BEN... SUE. JOHNNY'S FIRE-BALL CAME FROM JUST OVER THIS RIDGE AND THERE'S NO TELLING WHAT WE'LL...
WHAT THE--?! IT... IT'S BIZARRE-- FABULOUS!
THAT WE CAN SEE, STRETCH-- BUT WHAT IS IT?
I DON'T KNOW, BEN -- SOME KIND OF AWESOME CONSTRUCT, YET WITH FREEFORM FACETS! APPARENTLY A SYNTHESIS OF NATURE AND THE HAND OF MAN!
AND THE RED GLOW DEFINITELY LINKS IT TO THE MIST!


THEN, AS THE FANTASTI-CAR SWOOPS DOWN THE OTHER SIDE OF THE RIDGE, DIRECTLY INTO THE PATH OF THE ONCOMING PATROL...
HALT! WHO ARE YOU? WHAT HAVE YOU DONE WITH JOHNNY?!
Y'KNOW, SOMETHIN' TELLS ME THE NATIVES AIN'T GONNA BE FRIENDLY, STRETCH!
IN WHICH CASE, I'M GONNA BE JUST A LITTLE MAD.
IF YOU SPEAK OF THE FIERY ONE, OUTSIDER, HE IS OUR PRISONER-- JUST AS YOU SHALL BECOME OUR PRISONERS NOW!
UUH-WHOOM
KRUMPH
WHAT'D I TELL YA?! THEY AIN'T FRIENDLY!
AND I'M MORE THAN A LITTLE MAD...
IN FACT, I DO BELIEVE THAT THE BIG HAND AND THE LITTLE HAND ARE ABOUT TO ANNOUNCE THE FACT THAT IT'S--


--CLOBBERIN' TIME!
BROKT
THIS WAY, SUE! TRY TO STRIKE QUICKLY --CONFUSE THEM-- BEFORE ANYONE GETS HURT!


BUT--
MY ARM-- IT'S TURNING TO PUTTY-- I'VE NO STRENGTH LEFT! IT MUST BE OUR PROXIMITY TO THE IRRADIATED ICE STRUCTURE!
MY POWER IS CRAZY AGAIN TOO, REED! HALF MY BODY HAS GONE INVISIBLE, BUT I'M STILL ABLE TO--

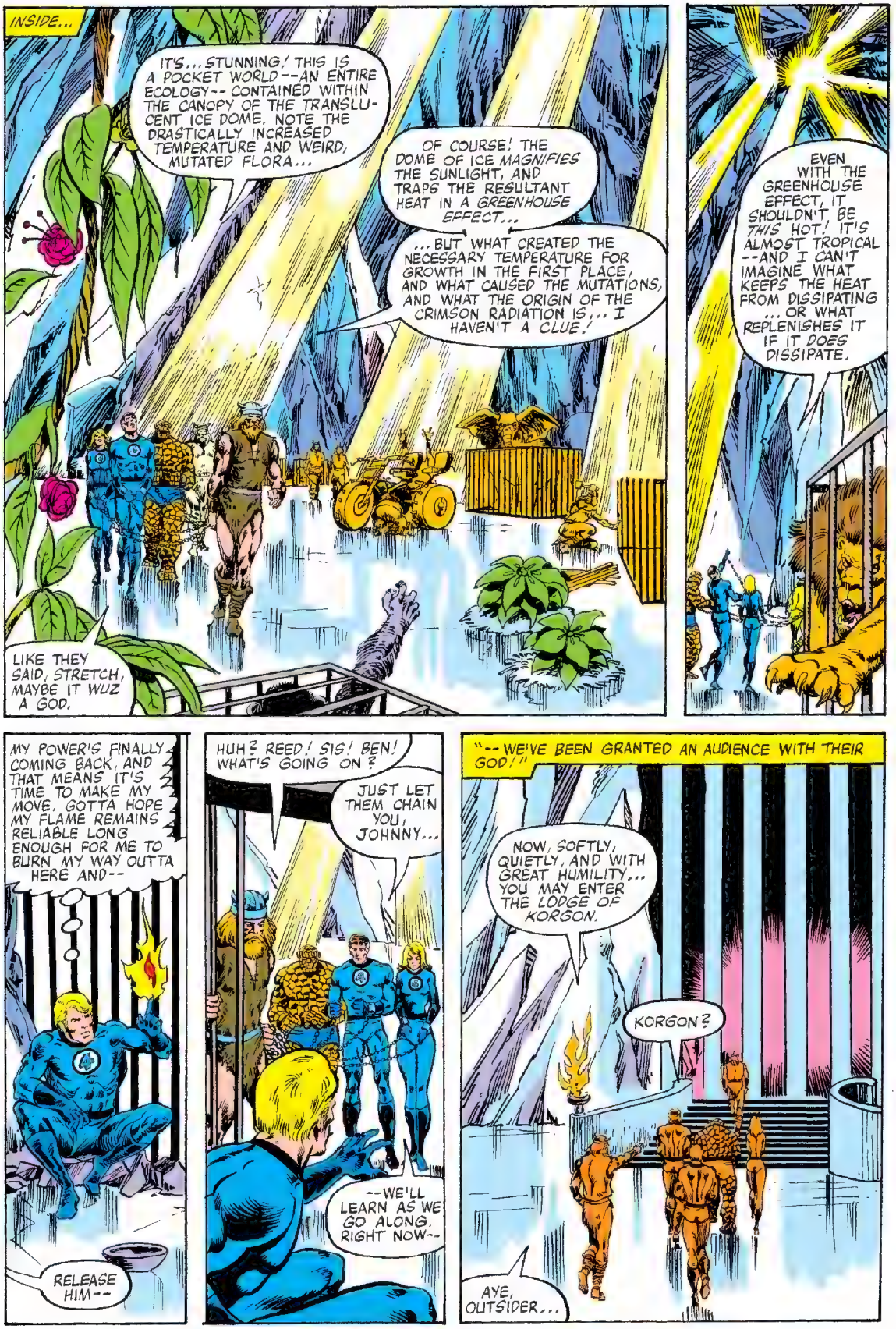

--ERECT AN INVISIBLE FORCE-WALL!
BAMP
WHAT DEVILTRY IS--UHN!

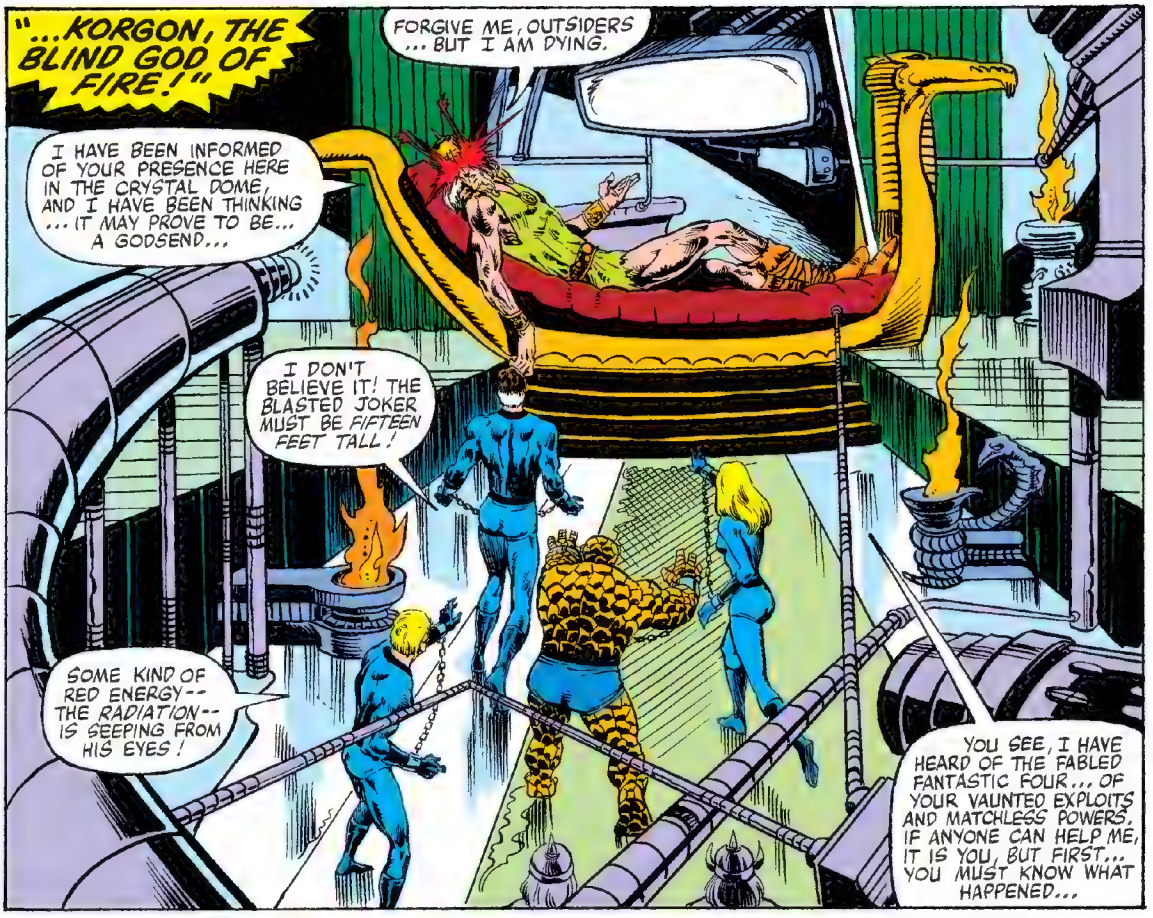
OOOPH! I'M TURNIN' EVEN MORE NORMAL THIS TIME-- AN' THAT PUNCH HURT THE BEN GRIMM SIDE O' ME LIKE THE DICKENS!
WUMP
AS YOU HAVE INJURED OUR GOD, SO SHALL I INJURE Y--

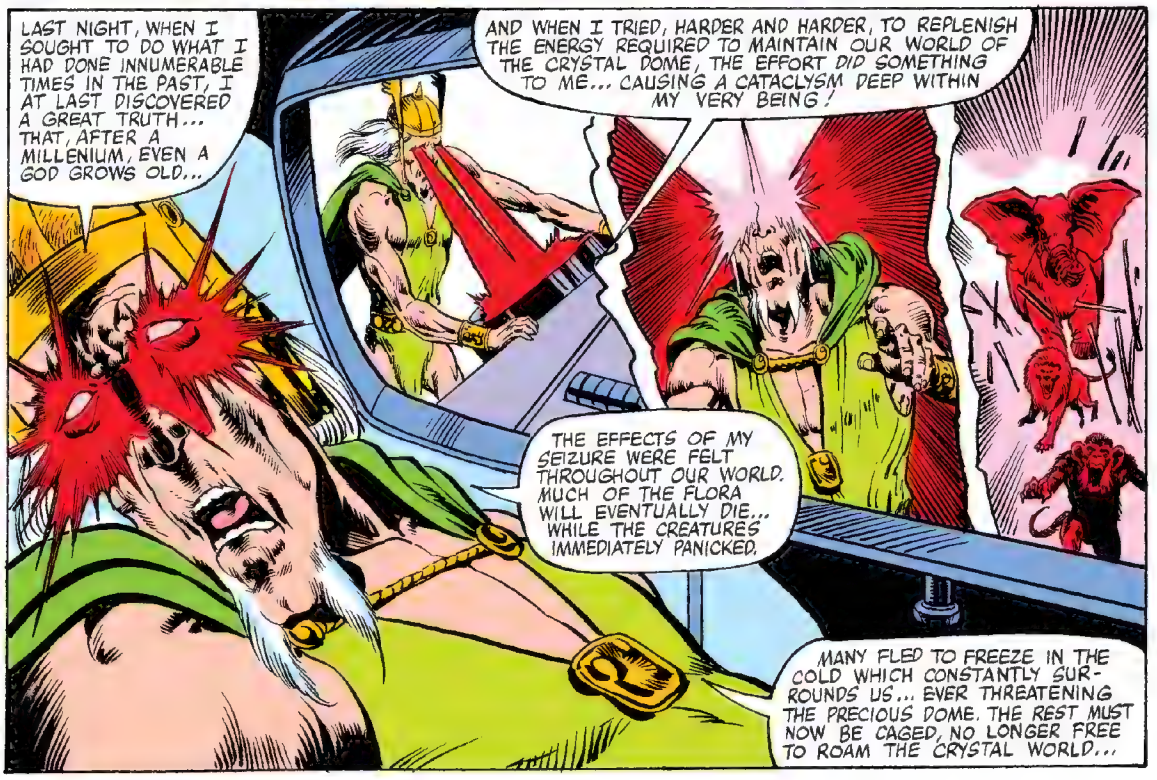
BUT AS FER THE EVER-LOVIN' BLUE-EYED THING SIDE O' ME...
WOPT
'NUFF SAID!

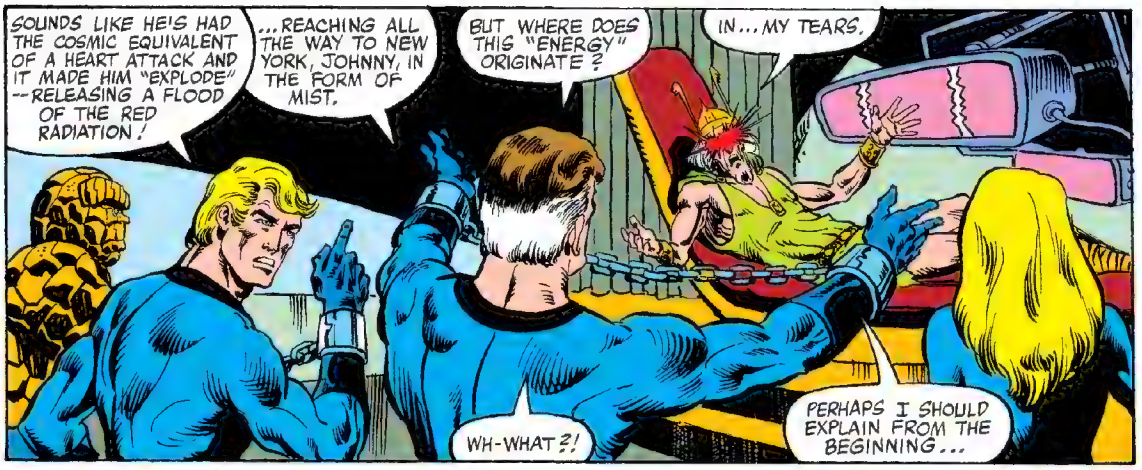
WE CAN'T GO ON LIKE THIS--NOT KNOWING WHEN OUR POWERS MAY GO HAYWIRE AT A CRUCIAL MOMENT!
THEN WHAT CAN WE--
WE'VE GOT TO TRY TO REASON WITH THEM, SUE-- MAKE THEM SEE THAT THE FIGHT IS A LOSING PROPOSITION FOR BOTH SIDES!

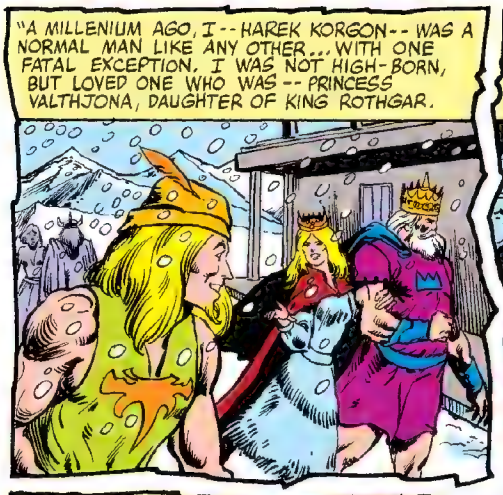
LISTEN TO ME! WE CAME ONLY TO INVESTIGATE THE "EXPLOSION" REPORTED IN THIS AREA--AND ITS EFFECTS ON US!
IF IT HAS SOMEHOW AFFECTED YOU AS WELL -- OR YOUR "GOD"-- THEN PERHAPS WE CAN HELP. BUT THERE'S NO NEED TO FIGHT!
NOW I'M BACK TA BEIN' THE THING AGAIN--JUST LIKE THAT. WEIRD.
PERHAPS WE SHOULD LISTEN TO HIM. TRULY, THEY POSSESS GODLIKE POWERS... PERHAPS THEY CAN HELP.
NO! WE CANNOT TRUST THEM! THEY CAUSED THE CATACLYSM--AND NOW, BECAUSE OF THEM OUR GOD MAY DIE!
STILL YOURSELF, KRAKI! YOU SPEAK WIGLIF'S NONSENSE--AND I AM IN COMMAND OF THIS PATROL!
HEAR ME, OUTSIDERS--AGREE TO BECOME OUR PRISONERS AND WE WILL TAKE YOU TO YOUR FRIEND, WITH THE PROMISE YOU WILL NOT BE HARMED UNLESS OUR GOD DEMANDS IT.
DON'T TRUST 'EM, STRETCH.
WE CAN PROMISE NO MORE.
VERY WELL. WE ARE YOUR PRISONERS ...FOR THE TIME BEING.
I HOPE YOU KNOW WHAT YOU'RE DOIN', STRETCH. IF IT WUZ UP TA ME, WE'D O' NEVER SURRENDERED TO THIS BERSERKO BUNCH O' SPACE AGE VIKINGS.
IT'S THE ONLY REASONABLE WAY, BEN. THE DECISION TO FIGHT MUST ALWAYS BE THE FINAL OPTION.
AND, IN SHACKLES, THEY APPROACH THE SCARLET PORTAL.

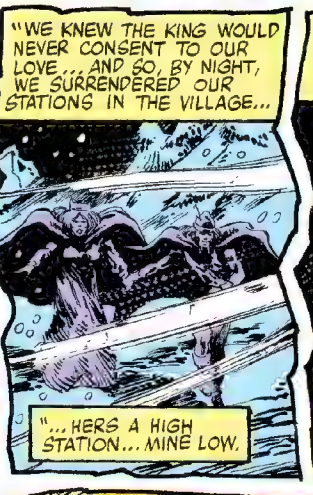

INSIDE...
IT'S... STUNNING! THIS IS A POCKET WORLD--AN ENTIRE ECOLOGY-- CONTAINED WITHIN THE CANOPY OF THE TRANSLUCENT ICE DOME. NOTE THE DRASTICALLY INCREASED TEMPERATURE AND WEIRD, MUTATED FLORA...
OF COURSE! THE DOME OF ICE MAGNIFIES THE SUNLIGHT, AND TRAPS THE RESULTANT HEAT IN A GREENHOUSE EFFECT...
...BUT WHAT CREATED THE NECESSARY TEMPERATURE FOR GROWTH IN THE FIRST PLACE, AND WHAT CAUSED THE MUTATIONS, AND WHAT THE ORIGIN OF THE CRIMSON RADIATION IS... I HAVEN'T A CLUE!
LIKE THEY SAID, STRETCH, MAYBE IT WUZ A GOD.
EVEN WITH THE GREENHOUSE EFFECT, IT SHOULDN'T BE THIS HOT! IT'S ALMOST TROPICAL --AND I CAN'T IMAGINE WHAT KEEPS THE HEAT FROM DISSIPATING ...OR WHAT REPLENISHES IT IF IT DOES DISSIPATE.
MY POWER'S FINALLY COMING BACK, AND THAT MEANS IT'S TIME TO MAKE MY MOVE. GOTTA HOPE MY FLAME REMAINS RELIABLE LONG ENOUGH FOR ME TO BURN MY WAY OUTTA HERE AND--
RELEASE HIM--
HUH? REED! SIS! BEN! WHAT'S GOING ON?
JUST LET THEM CHAIN YOU, JOHNNY...
--WE'LL LEARN AS WE GO ALONG. RIGHT NOW--
"--WE'VE BEEN GRANTED AN AUDIENCE WITH THEIR GOD!"
NOW, SOFTLY, QUIETLY, AND WITH GREAT HUMILITY... YOU MAY ENTER THE LODGE OF KORGON.
KORGON?
AYE, OUTSIDER...

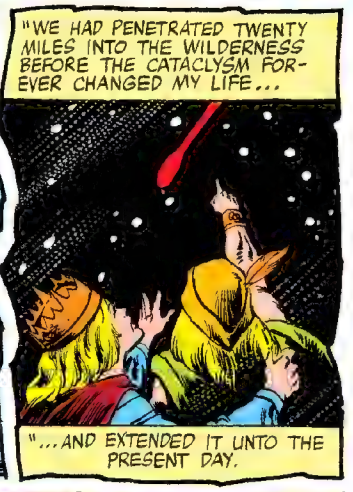

"...KORGON, THE BLIND GOD OF FIRE!"
FORGIVE ME, OUTSIDERS ... BUT I AM DYING.
I HAVE BEEN INFORMED OF YOUR PRESENCE HERE IN THE CRYSTAL DOME, AND I HAVE BEEN THINKING ... IT MAY PROVE TO BE... A GODSEND...
I DON'T BELIEVE IT! THE BLASTED JOKER MUST BE FIFTEEN FEET TALL!
SOME KIND OF RED ENERGY-- THE RADIATION-- IS SEEPING FROM HIS EYES!
YOU SEE, I HAVE HEARD OF THE FABLED FANTASTIC FOUR... OF YOUR VAUNTED EXPLOITS AND MATCHLESS POWERS. IF ANYONE CAN HELP ME, IT IS YOU, BUT FIRST... YOU MUST KNOW WHAT HAPPENED...

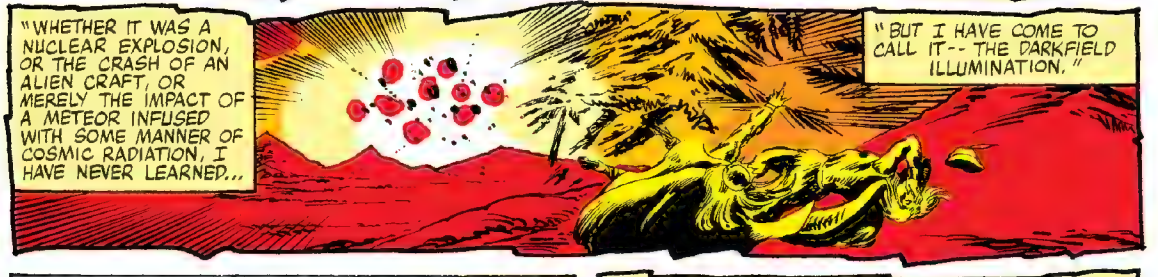

LAST NIGHT, WHEN I SOUGHT TO DO WHAT I HAD DONE INNUMERABLE TIMES IN THE PAST, I AT LAST DISCOVERED A GREAT TRUTH... THAT, AFTER A MILLENIUM, EVEN A GOD GROWS OLD...
AND WHEN I TRIED, HARDER AND HARDER, TO REPLENISH THE ENERGY REQUIRED TO MAINTAIN OUR WORLD OF THE CRYSTAL DOME, THE EFFORT DID SOMETHING TO ME... CAUSING A CATACLYSM DEEP WITHIN MY VERY BEING!
THE EFFECTS OF MY SEIZURE WERE FELT THROUGHOUT OUR WORLD. MUCH OF THE FLORA WILL EVENTUALLY DIE... WHILE THE CREATURES IMMEDIATELY PANICKED.
MANY FLED TO FREEZE IN THE COLD WHICH CONSTANTLY SURROUNDS US... EVER THREATENING THE PRECIOUS DOME. THE REST MUST NOW BE CAGED, NO LONGER FREE TO ROAM THE CRYSTAL WORLD...


SOUNDS LIKE HE'S HAD THE COSMIC EQUIVALENT OF A HEART ATTACK AND IT MADE HIM "EXPLODE" --RELEASING A FLOOD OF THE RED RADIATION!
...REACHING ALL THE WAY TO NEW YORK, JOHNNY, IN THE FORM OF MIST.
BUT WHERE DOES THIS "ENERGY" ORIGINATE?
IN... MY TEARS.
WH-WHAT?!
PERHAPS I SHOULD EXPLAIN FROM THE BEGINNING...

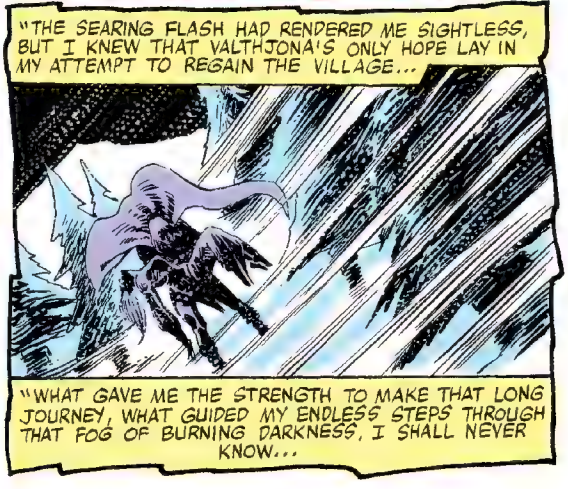

"A MILLENIUM AGO, I -- HAREK KORGON -- WAS A NORMAL MAN LIKE ANY OTHER... WITH ONE FATAL EXCEPTION. I WAS NOT HIGH-BORN, BUT LOVED ONE WHO WAS -- PRINCESS VALTHJONA, DAUGHTER OF KING ROTHGAR.


"WE KNEW THE KING WOULD NEVER CONSENT TO OUR LOVE... AND SO, BY NIGHT, WE SURRENDERED OUR STATIONS IN THE VILLAGE...
"... HERS A HIGH STATION... MINE LOW.


"WE HAD PENETRATED TWENTY MILES INTO THE WILDERNESS BEFORE THE CATACLYSM FOR-EVER CHANGED MY LIFE...
"... AND EXTENDED IT UNTO THE PRESENT DAY.


"WHETHER IT WAS A NUCLEAR EXPLOSION, OR THE CRASH OF AN ALIEN CRAFT, OR MERELY THE IMPACT OF A METEOR INFUSED WITH SOME MANNER OF COSMIC RADIATION, I HAVE NEVER LEARNED...
"BUT I HAVE COME TO CALL IT -- THE DARKFIELD ILLUMINATION."

IT SOUNDS LIKE A SIMILAR OCCURRENCE IN 1908 -- THE TUNGUSKA EXPLOSION IN SIBERIA.
WHATEVER IT WAS, REED RICHARDS, IT WAS THE BEGINNING OF ENDLESS TRAGEDY FOR ME.


"THE SEARING FLASH HAD RENDERED ME SIGHTLESS, BUT I KNEW THAT VALTHJONA'S ONLY HOPE LAY IN MY ATTEMPT TO REGAIN THE VILLAGE...
"WHAT GAVE ME THE STRENGTH TO MAKE THAT LONG JOURNEY, WHAT GUIDED MY ENDLESS STEPS THROUGH THAT FOG OF BURNING DARKNESS, I SHALL NEVER KNOW...

"IN TRUTH, IT COULD WELL HAVE ENDED THEN-- SHOULD HAVE-- IN THAT LONG AGO NIGHT OF STUMBLING TERROR AND SOBBING DESPERATION...
"BUT IT DID NOT.
"SOMEHOW, BEYOND LIFE YET BEYOND DEATH, I REACHED THE OUTSKIRTS OF OUR FORMER VILLAGE...
"...BEFORE SUCCUMBING TO THE ORDEAL...
"...BEFORE MY BURNING EYES WERE FINALLY QUENCHED IN THE COOL OF FULL DARKNESS.
"BY ALL RIGHTS I SHOULD HAVE DIED.
"INSTEAD, I RECOVERED...
"...TO FIND THAT VALTHJONA HAD NOT. I WAS BLIND-- BUT I STILL WITNESSED THE FIERCE FLAMES OF MY BELOVED'S FINAL VOYAGE...
"I WEPT TEARS OF FIRE.
"BEING BLIND, I WAS SPARED FULL BLAME FOR PRINCESS VALTHJONA'S DEATH... AND WAS PERMITTED BY KING ROTHGAR TO REMAIN IN THE VILLAGE AS A RESIDENT OUTCAST, OSTRACIZED BY ALL AROUND ME.
"MONTHS LATER THE CHANGES-- THE MUTATIONS-- BEGAN... AND ROTHGAR FULLY BANISHED ME, SAYING I HAD BEEN STRUCK DOWN BY THE GODS AS PUNISHMENT FOR MY FORBIDDEN LOVE, AND WAS NOW FATED TO BECOME A DEVIL.
"AND SO IT SEEMED, FOR I FELT TRULY DAMNED--AND WANTED NO MORE CONGRESS WITH THE WORLD OF MEN...

"BUT AS I WANDERED THROUGH MY DARK AND PRIVATE WORLD OF FIRE, OTHERS SAW ME...
"AND IN THEIR EYES, IRONICALLY, I WAS NOT SEEN AS A DEVIL AT ALL...
"...BUT, RATHER, AS A GOD MYSELF. THEY SOUGHT TO FOLLOW ME...
"I TOLD THEM THEY MUST BE PREPARED TO WALK AWAY FROM THE WORLD OF MEN, NEVER TO RETURN. SOME AGREED--AND THE TALE OF OUR TREK, OUR EXODUS, GUIDED ONLY BY THE NEWLY EMERGING SIGHT GRANTED IN BLINDNESS...
"...WOULD COMPRISE AN EPIC IN ITSELF.
"WHEN WE REACHED THIS FORSAKEN REGION, MY MUTATED POWERS WERE AT THEIR PEAK.
"I MELTED OUT THIS DOME WITH THE STORM OF ENERGY FLOWING FROM MY EYES. THE ORIGINAL FOLLOWERS MADE IT THEIR HOME, WORSHIPPING ME--JUST AS THEIR DESCENDANTS DO TODAY."
NOW I "SEE" AGAIN, BUT WITH DAMNED EYES GLIMPSING SIGHTS BETTER LEFT TO MAD DREAMS. I "SEE" YOU EVEN NOW, AND YOU ARE LIKE BURNING DEMONS AGAINST A DARK FIELD OF NIGHTMARE...
...HELLISH DARKFIELD ILLUMINATIONS.
I GUESS THAT'S EVEN WORSE THAN WHAT ALICIA'S STUCK WITH!
THERE ARE SO MANY QUESTIONS, KORGON. THE ANIMALS--HOW YOU'VE HEARD OF US--THE ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY YOU HAVE--HOW YOUR "TEARS" PROVIDE THE ENERGY FOR--
THE ANSWERS WILL HAVE TO WAIT, REED RICHARDS.
I AM DYING. IF I DO SO, THE WORLD OF MY FOLLOWERS WILL DIE AS WELL.
YOU MUST HEAL ME... SO THAT I MAY REPLENISH THE ENERGY OF THE DOME... AT LEAST ONE LAST TIME, SHOULD YOU SUCCEED, I WILL NEGATE THE EFFECT OF THE RADIATION ON YOUR POWERS.
BUT SHOULD YOU REFUSE OR FAIL...
...YOU MUST DIE.
AND THE BLIND GOD WEEPS IN CRIMSON.
NEXT ISSUE
THE EPIC AND TRAGIC CONCLUSION OF PERHAPS THE MOST UNUSUAL F.F. SAGA OF ALL--
THE BLIND GOD'S TEARS!
(ALSO, A STUNNING SURPRISE GUEST STAR!)

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Fantastic Four
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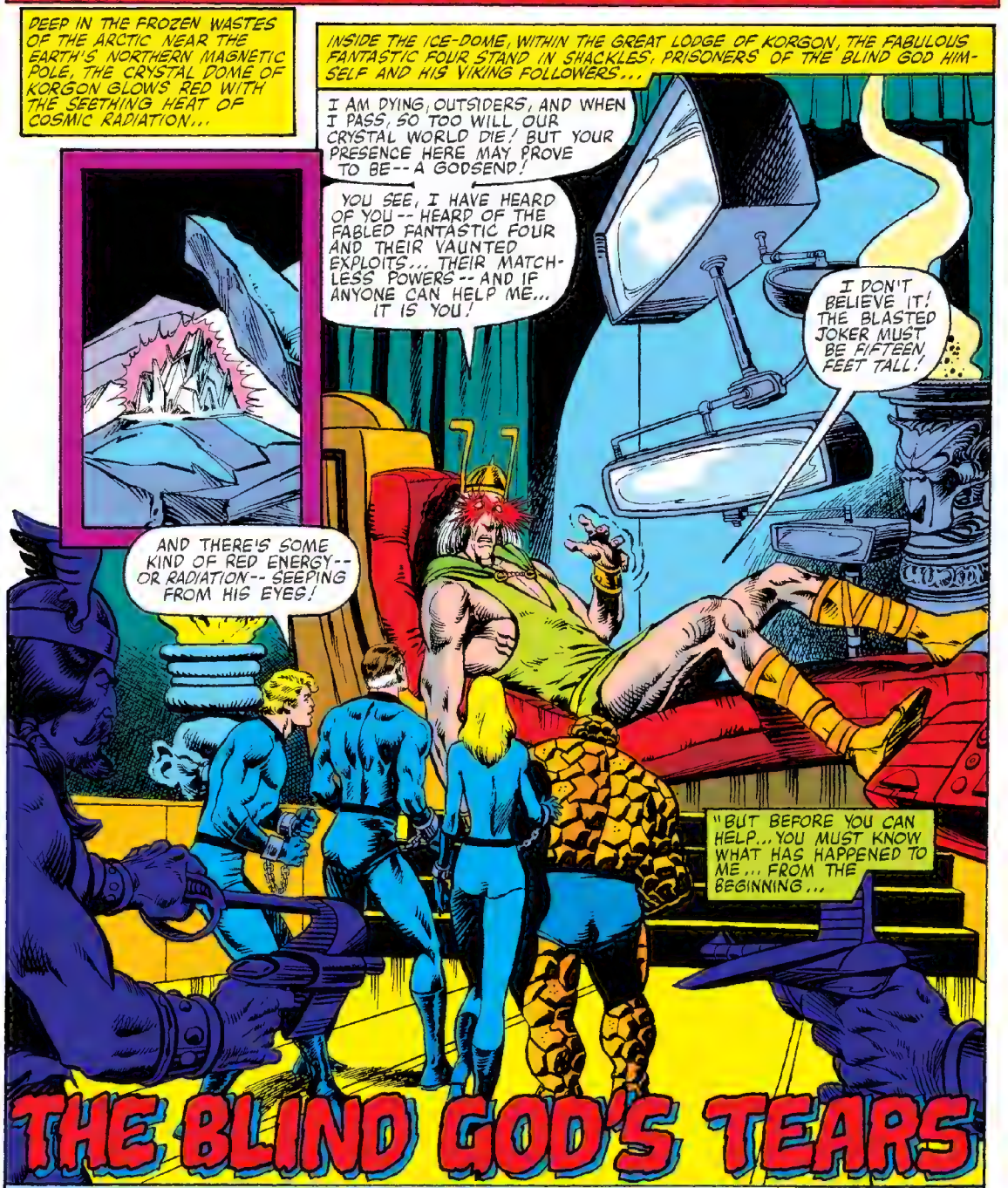
A GOD ENRAGED!
PLUS A RARE CAMEO APPEARANCE BY THE MIGHTY THOR!

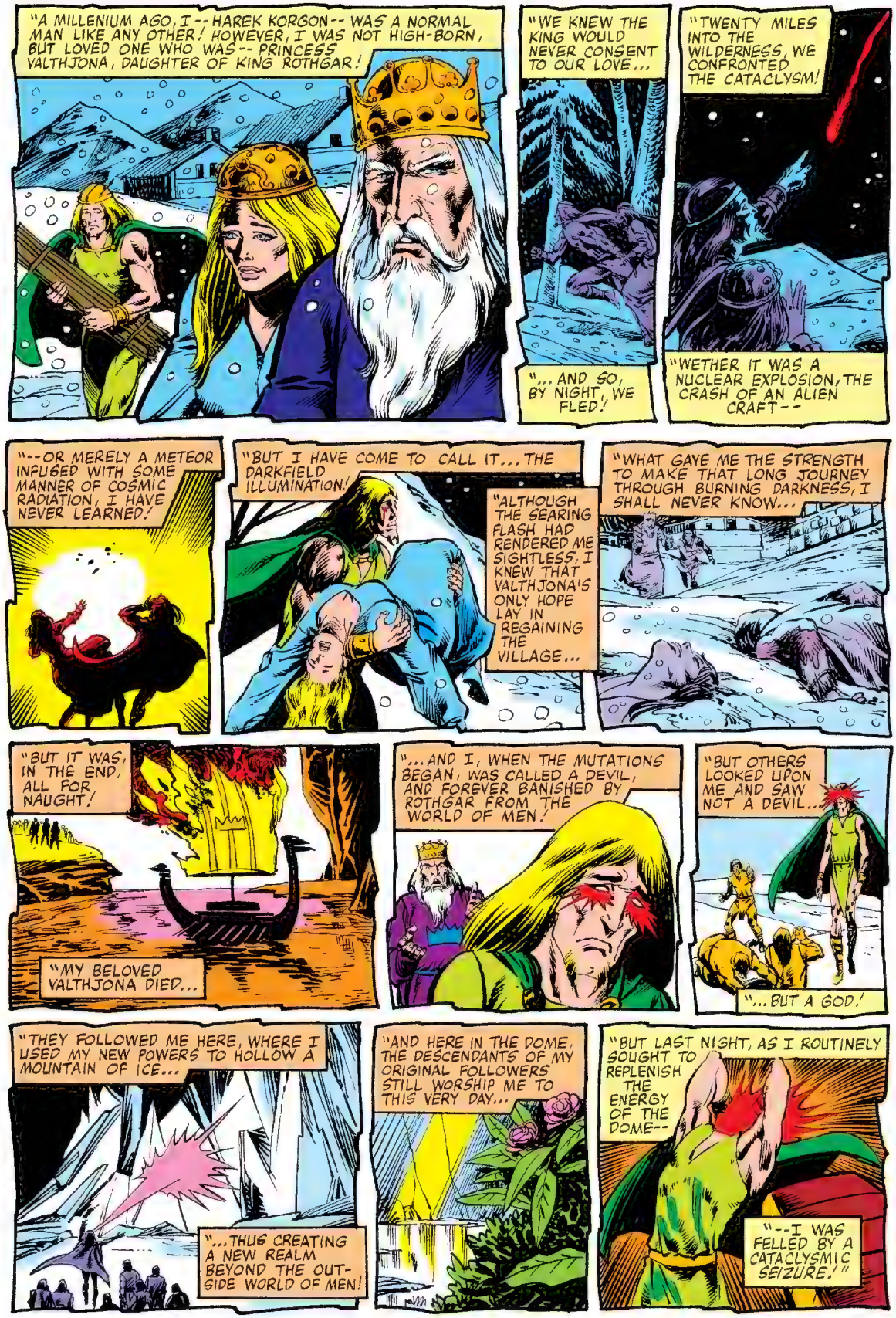
Reed Richards! Ben Grimm! Sue Richards! Johnny Storm! Together they braved the unknown terrors of outer space and were changed into something more than human! MR. FANTASTIC! THE THING! THE INVISIBLE GIRL! THE HUMAN TORCH! And now the world will never again be the same!

Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE FANTASTIC FOUR!®

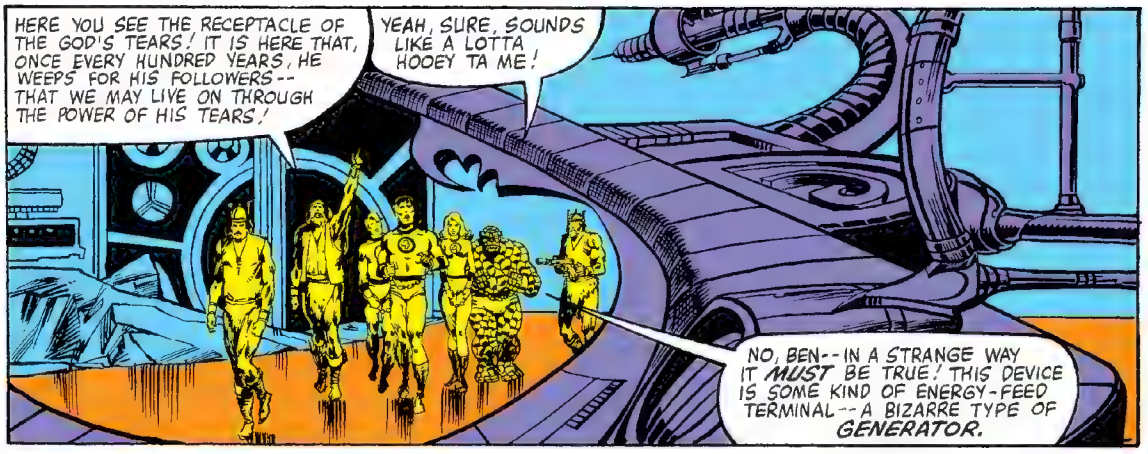

DEEP IN THE FROZEN WASTES OF THE ARCTIC NEAR THE EARTH'S NORTHERN MAGNETIC POLE, THE CRYSTAL DOME OF KORGON GLOWS RED WITH THE SEETHING HEAT OF COSMIC RADIATION...
INSIDE THE ICE-DOME, WITHIN THE GREAT LODGE OF KORGON, THE FABULOUS FANTASTIC FOUR STAND IN SHACKLES, PRISONERS OF THE BLIND GOD HIMSELF AND HIS VIKING FOLLOWERS...
I AM DYING, OUTSIDERS, AND WHEN I PASS, SO TOO WILL OUR CRYSTAL WORLD DIE! BUT YOUR PRESENCE HERE MAY PROVE TO BE--A GODSEND!
YOU SEE, I HAVE HEARD OF YOU--HEARD OF THE FABLED FANTASTIC FOUR AND THEIR VAUNTED EXPLOITS... THEIR MATCHLESS POWERS--AND IF ANYONE CAN HELP ME... IT IS YOU!
I DON'T BELIEVE IT! THE BLASTED JOKER MUST BE FIFTEEN FEET TALL!
AND THERE'S SOME KIND OF RED ENERGY--OR RADIATION--SEEPING FROM HIS EYES!
"BUT BEFORE YOU CAN HELP...YOU MUST KNOW WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO ME... FROM THE BEGINNING...

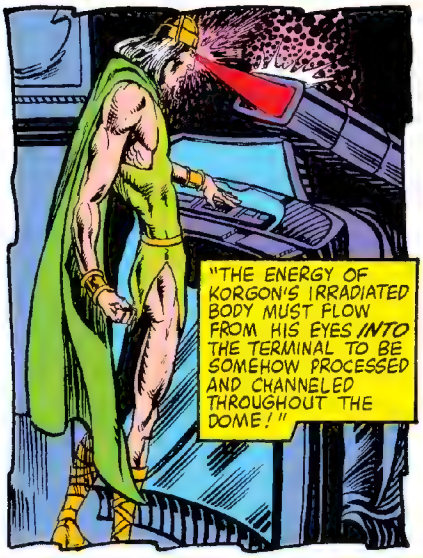
THE BLIND GOD'S TEARS

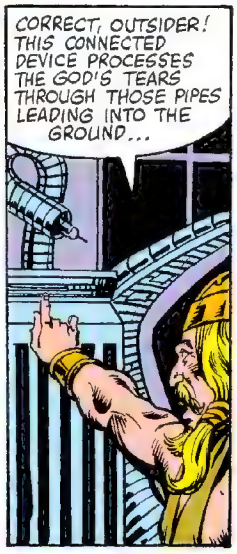
DOUG MOENCH WRITER / BILL SIENKIEWICZ & PABLO MARCOS ARTISTS / NOVAK, LETTERER ROUSSOS, COLORIST / JIM SALICRUP EDITOR / JIM SHOOTER EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

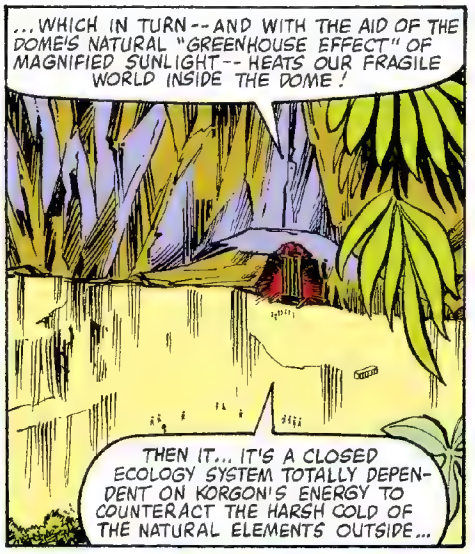

"A MILLENIUM AGO, I -- HAREK KORGON -- WAS A NORMAL MAN LIKE ANY OTHER! HOWEVER, I WAS NOT HIGH-BORN, BUT LOVED ONE WHO WAS -- PRINCESS VALTHJONA, DAUGHTER OF KING ROTHGAR!
"WE KNEW THE KING WOULD NEVER CONSENT TO OUR LOVE...
"... AND SO, BY NIGHT, WE FLED!
"TWENTY MILES INTO THE WILDERNESS, WE CONFRONTED THE CATACLYSM!
"WETHER IT WAS A NUCLEAR EXPLOSION, THE CRASH OF AN ALIEN CRAFT --
"--OR MERELY A METEOR INFUSED WITH SOME MANNER OF COSMIC RADIATION, I HAVE NEVER LEARNED!
"BUT I HAVE COME TO CALL IT... THE DARKFIELD ILLUMINATION!
"ALTHOUGH THE SEARING FLASH HAD RENDERED ME SIGHTLESS, I KNEW THAT VALTHJONA'S ONLY HOPE LAY IN REGAINING THE VILLAGE...
"WHAT GAVE ME THE STRENGTH TO MAKE THAT LONG JOURNEY THROUGH BURNING DARKNESS, I SHALL NEVER KNOW...
"BUT IT WAS, IN THE END, ALL FOR NAUGHT!
"MY BELOVED VALTHJONA DIED...
"... AND I, WHEN THE MUTATIONS BEGAN, WAS CALLED A DEVIL, AND FOREVER BANISHED BY ROTHGAR FROM THE WORLD OF MEN!
"BUT OTHERS LOOKED UPON ME AND SAW NOT A DEVIL...
"... BUT A GOD!
"THEY FOLLOWED ME HERE, WHERE I USED MY NEW POWERS TO HOLLOW A MOUNTAIN OF ICE...
"... THUS CREATING A NEW REALM BEYOND THE OUTSIDE WORLD OF MEN!
"AND HERE IN THE DOME, THE DESCENDANTS OF MY ORIGINAL FOLLOWERS STILL WORSHIP ME TO THIS VERY DAY...
"BUT LAST NIGHT, AS I ROUTINELY SOUGHT TO REPLENISH THE ENERGY OF THE DOME--
"--I WAS FELLED BY A CATACLYSMIC SEIZURE!"

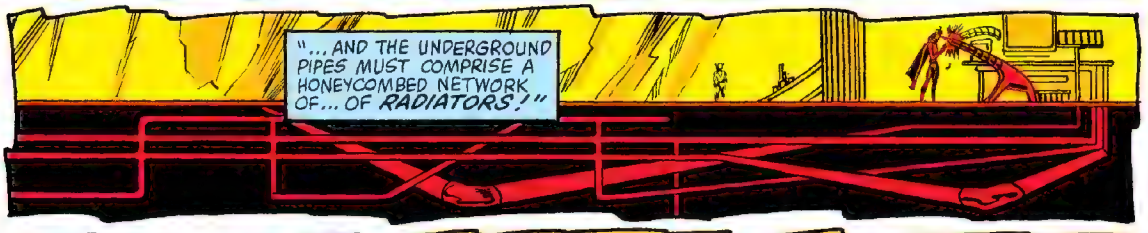
AND THE RESULTANT ENERGY EXPLOSION FROM YOUR EYES-- THE EERIE RED MIST WHICH SWEPT THE EASTERN SEABOARD OF NORTH AMERICA, AND WHICH WE CAME TO INVESTIGATE-- IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DISTORTIONS OF OUR POWERS?
YES! IT IS THE SAME ENERGY WHICH LONG AGO SLEW MY BELOVED VALTHJONA, MADE ME BLIND, AND TURNED ME INTO A GOD!
NOW I "SEE" AGAIN--BUT WITH CURSED EYES BEHIND WHICH NO MAN'S MIND HAS EVER LAIN CAPTIVE, BOUND IN HELPLESS TORMENT, GLIMPSING SIGHTS BETTER LEFT TO MAD DREAMS!
I "SEE" YOU EVEN NOW, AND YOU ARE LIKE BURNING DEMONS AGAINST A DARK FIELD OF NIGHTMARE... HELLISH DARK-FIELD ILLUMINATIONS!
I GUESS, IN A LOTTA WAYS, THAT'S EVEN WORSE THAN WHAT ALICIA'S STUCK WITH.
THERE ARE SO MANY QUESTIONS, KORGON, HOW YOU'VE HEARD OF US-- THE ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY YOU HAVE-- HOW YOUR "TEARS" PROVIDE THE ENERGY FOR--
THE ANSWERS MUST WAIT, REED RICHARDS! I AM DYING!
YOU MUST HEAL ME SO THAT I MAY REPLENISH THE ENERGY OF THE DOME AT LEAST ONE LAST TIME! SHOULD YOU SUCCEED, I WILL NEGATE THE RADIATION'S EFFECT ON YOUR POWERS! BUT SHOULD YOU REFUSE OR FAIL-- YOU MUST DIE!
AND THE BLIND GOD WEEPS IN CRIMSON!
DIE?! YA THINK SO, HUH? AN' YOU AND WHAT ARMY'S GONNA KILL US, YA BLASTED OVER-GROWN LEIF ERICSON?!
NO! I KNEW IT WOULD COME TO THIS! WHY CAN'T WE JUST STAY AT HOME AND BE NORMAL?! EVERY TIME WE GO ON A MISSION IT ALWAYS--
EASY, SIS!
HROLF! WIGLIF! SHOW THEM WHY IT MUST BE SO!
FOLLOW US, OUTSIDERS, AND WE WILL SHOW YOU THE SECRETS OF THE DOME!

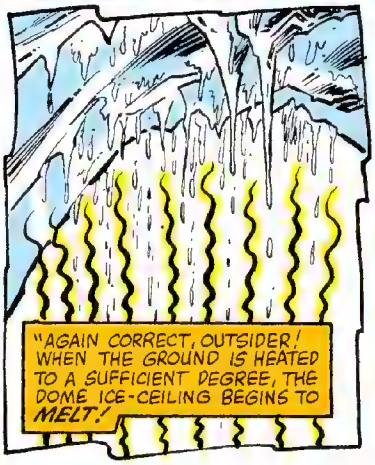

HERE YOU SEE THE RECEPTACLE OF THE GOD'S TEARS! IT IS HERE THAT, ONCE EVERY HUNDRED YEARS, HE WEEPS FOR HIS FOLLOWERS-- THAT WE MAY LIVE ON THROUGH THE POWER OF HIS TEARS!
YEAH, SURE, SOUNDS LIKE A LOTTA HOOEY TA ME!
NO, BEN--IN A STRANGE WAY IT MUST BE TRUE! THIS DEVICE IS SOME KIND OF ENERGY-FEED TERMINAL--A BIZARRE TYPE OF GENERATOR.

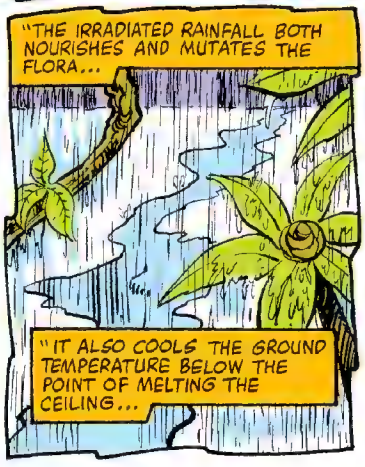

"THE ENERGY OF KORGON'S IRRADIATED BODY MUST FLOW FROM HIS EYES INTO THE TERMINAL TO BE SOMEHOW PROCESSED AND CHANNELED THROUGHOUT THE DOME!"

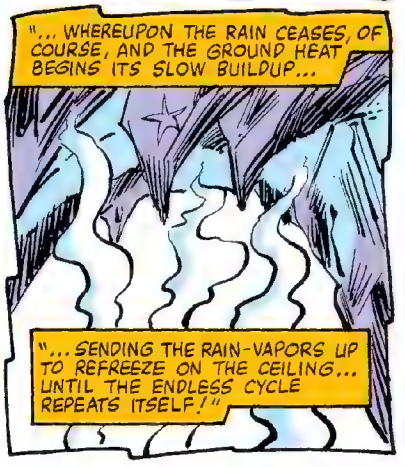

CORRECT, OUTSIDER! THIS CONNECTED DEVICE PROCESSES THE GOD'S TEARS THROUGH THOSE PIPES LEADING INTO THE GROUND...

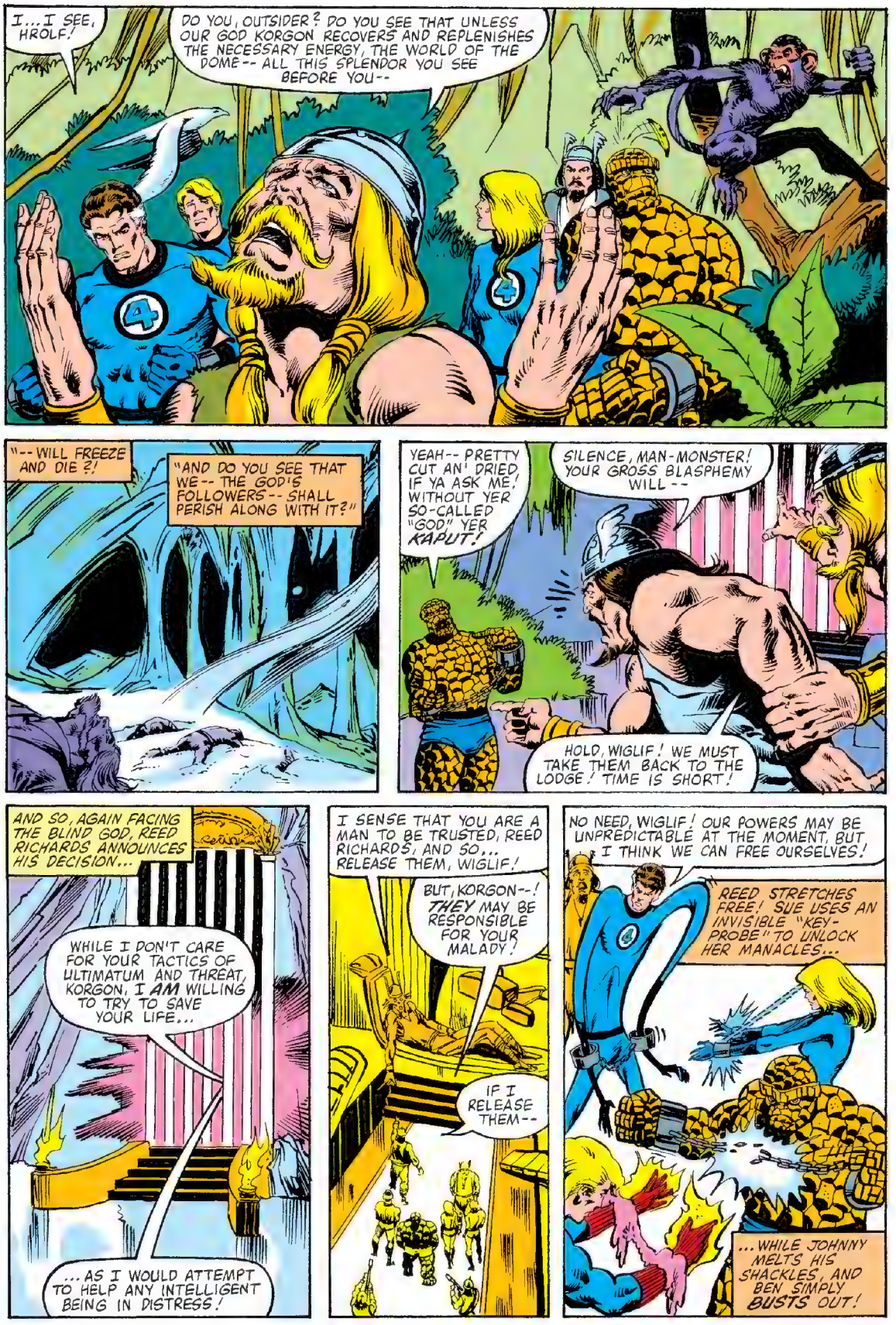

...WHICH IN TURN--AND WITH THE AID OF THE DOME'S NATURAL "GREENHOUSE EFFECT" OF MAGNIFIED SUNLIGHT--HEATS OUR FRAGILE WORLD INSIDE THE DOME!
THEN IT... IT'S A CLOSED ECOLOGY SYSTEM TOTALLY DEPENDENT ON KORGON'S ENERGY TO COUNTERACT THE HARSH COLD OF THE NATURAL ELEMENTS OUTSIDE...

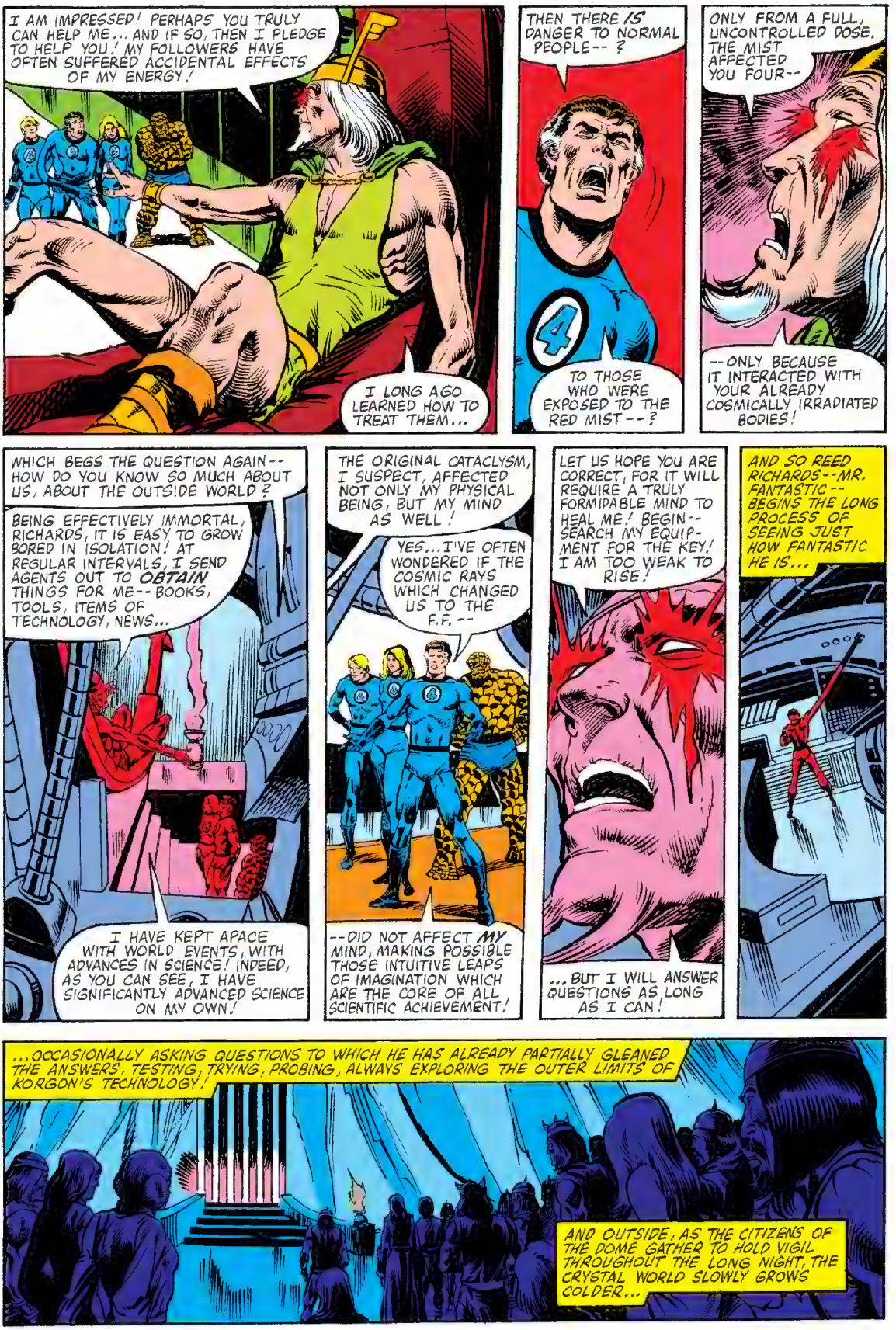

"...AND THE UNDERGROUND PIPES MUST COMPRISE A HONEYCOMBED NETWORK OF... OF RADIATORS!"

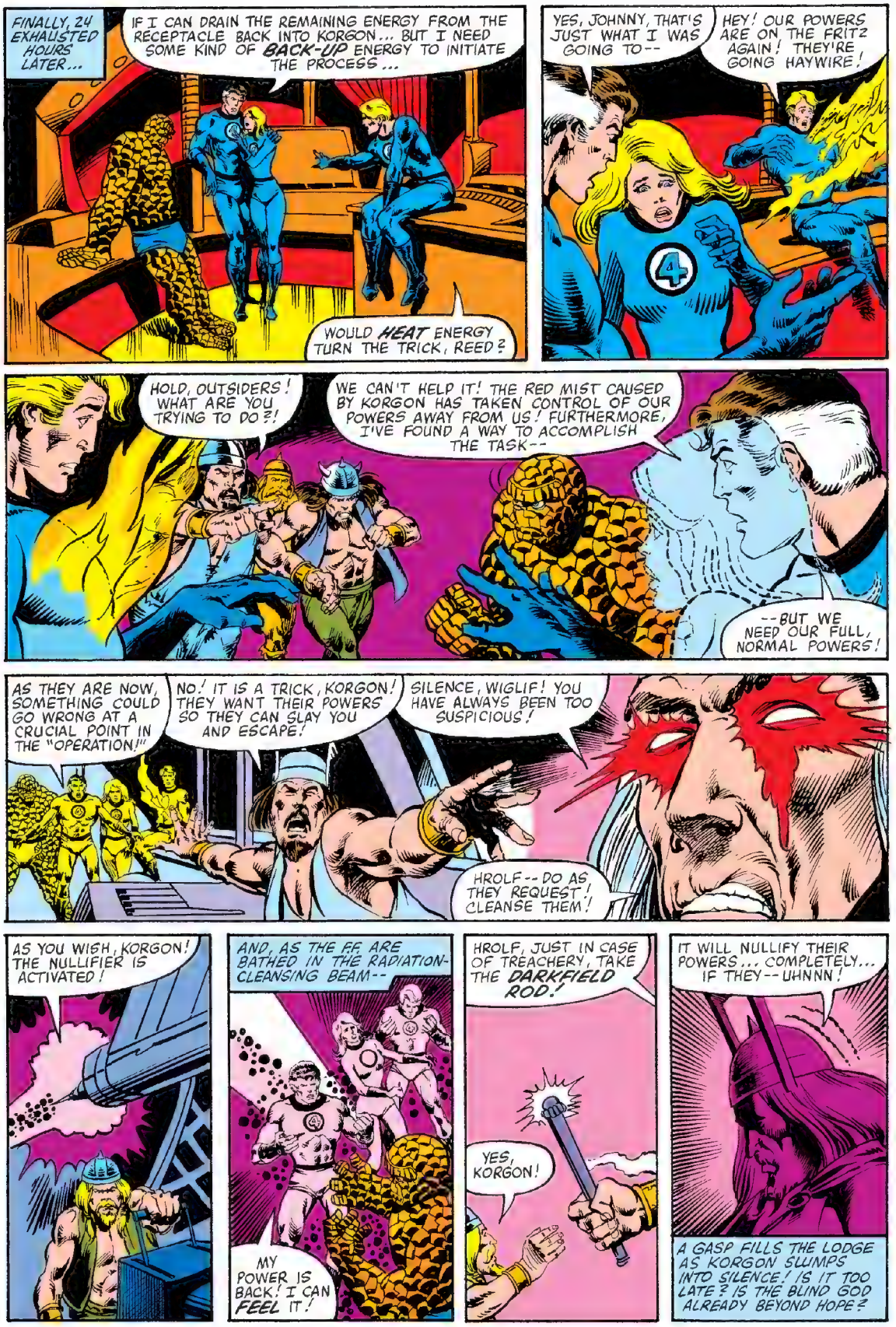

"AGAIN CORRECT, OUTSIDER! WHEN THE GROUND IS HEATED TO A SUFFICIENT DEGREE, THE DOME ICE-CEILING BEGINS TO MELT!


"THE IRRADIATED RAINFALL BOTH NOURISHES AND MUTATES THE FLORA...
"IT ALSO COOLS THE GROUND TEMPERATURE BELOW THE POINT OF MELTING THE CEILING...

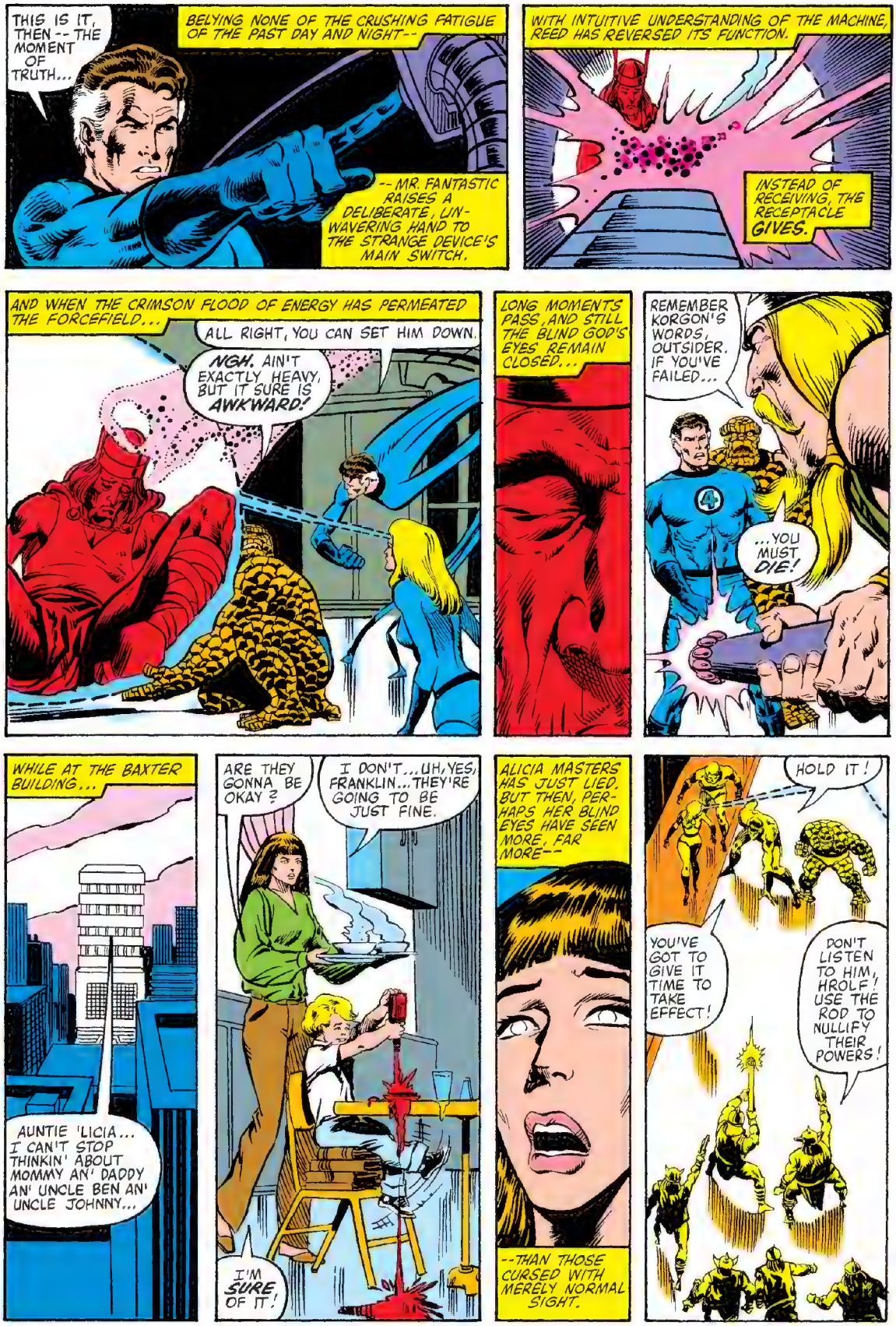

"...WHEREUPON THE RAIN CEASES, OF COURSE, AND THE GROUND HEAT BEGINS ITS SLOW BUILDUP...
"...SENDING THE RAIN-VAPORS UP TO REFREEZE ON THE CEILING... UNTIL THE ENDLESS CYCLE REPEATS ITSELF!"

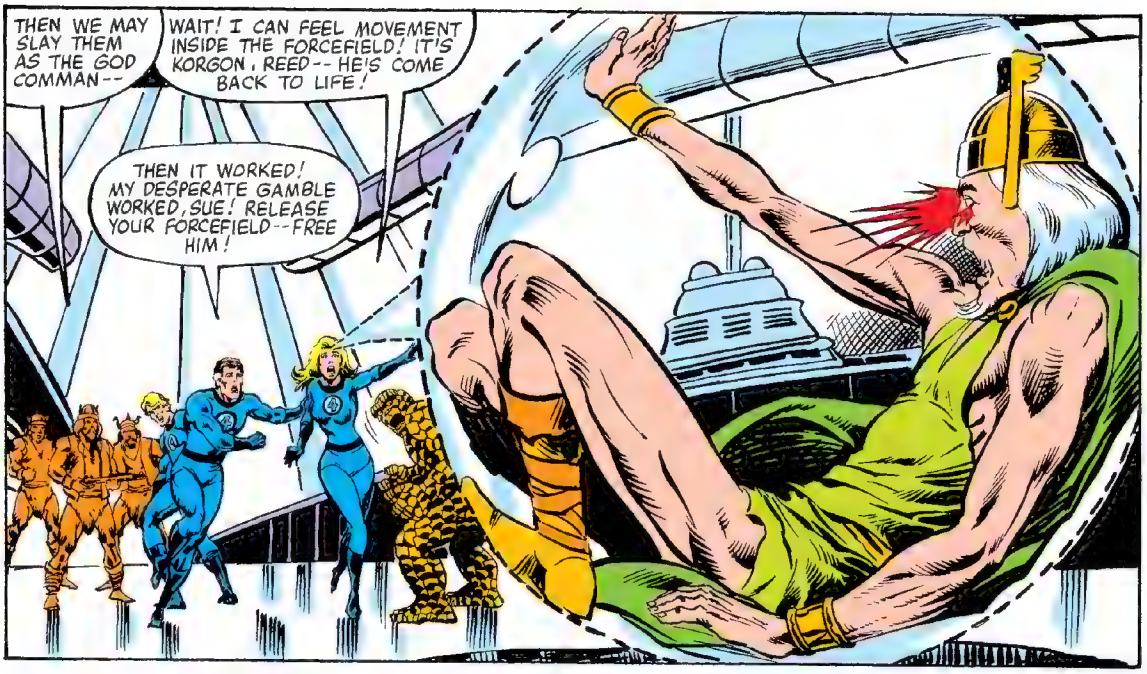

I...I SEE, HROLF!
DO YOU, OUTSIDER? DO YOU SEE THAT UNLESS OUR GOD KORGON RECOVERS AND REPLENISHES THE NECESSARY ENERGY, THE WORLD OF THE DOME-- ALL THIS SPLENDOR YOU SEE BEFORE YOU--
"--WILL FREEZE AND DIE?!
"AND DO YOU SEE THAT WE-- THE GOD'S FOLLOWERS-- SHALL PERISH ALONG WITH IT?"
YEAH-- PRETTY CUT AN' DRIED IF YA ASK ME! WITHOUT YER SO-CALLED "GOD" YER KAPUT!
SILENCE, MAN-MONSTER! YOUR GROSS BLASPHEMY WILL--
HOLD, WIGLIF! WE MUST TAKE THEM BACK TO THE LODGE! TIME IS SHORT!
AND SO, AGAIN FACING THE BLIND GOD, REED RICHARDS ANNOUNCES HIS DECISION...
WHILE I DON'T CARE FOR YOUR TACTICS OF ULTIMATUM AND THREAT, KORGON, I AM WILLING TO TRY TO SAVE YOUR LIFE...
...AS I WOULD ATTEMPT TO HELP ANY INTELLIGENT BEING IN DISTRESS!
I SENSE THAT YOU ARE A MAN TO BE TRUSTED, REED RICHARDS, AND SO... RELEASE THEM, WIGLIF!
BUT, KORGON--! THEY MAY BE RESPONSIBLE FOR YOUR MALADY!
IF I RELEASE THEM--
NO NEED, WIGLIF! OUR POWERS MAY BE UNPREDICTABLE AT THE MOMENT, BUT I THINK WE CAN FREE OURSELVES!
REED STRETCHES FREE! SUE USES AN INVISIBLE "KEY-PROBE" TO UNLOCK HER MANACLES...
...WHILE JOHNNY MELTS HIS SHACKLES, AND BEN SIMPLY BUSTS OUT!


I AM IMPRESSED! PERHAPS YOU TRULY CAN HELP ME... AND IF SO, THEN I PLEDGE TO HELP YOU! MY FOLLOWERS HAVE OFTEN SUFFERED ACCIDENTAL EFFECTS OF MY ENERGY!
I LONG AGO LEARNED HOW TO TREAT THEM...
THEN THERE IS DANGER TO NORMAL PEOPLE-- ?
TO THOSE WHO WERE EXPOSED TO THE RED MIST --?
ONLY FROM A FULL, UNCONTROLLED DOSE, THE MIST AFFECTED YOU FOUR--
--ONLY BECAUSE IT INTERACTED WITH YOUR ALREADY COSMICALLY IRRADIATED BODIES!
WHICH BEGS THE QUESTION AGAIN-- HOW DO YOU KNOW SO MUCH ABOUT US, ABOUT THE OUTSIDE WORLD?
BEING EFFECTIVELY IMMORTAL, RICHARDS, IT IS EASY TO GROW BORED IN ISOLATION! AT REGULAR INTERVALS, I SEND AGENTS OUT TO OBTAIN THINGS FOR ME-- BOOKS, TOOLS, ITEMS OF TECHNOLOGY, NEWS...
I HAVE KEPT APACE WITH WORLD EVENTS, WITH ADVANCES IN SCIENCE! INDEED, AS YOU CAN SEE, I HAVE SIGNIFICANTLY ADVANCED SCIENCE ON MY OWN!
THE ORIGINAL CATACLYSM, I SUSPECT, AFFECTED NOT ONLY MY PHYSICAL BEING, BUT MY MIND AS WELL!
YES... I'VE OFTEN WONDERED IF THE COSMIC RAYS WHICH CHANGED US TO THE F.F. --
--DID NOT AFFECT MY MIND, MAKING POSSIBLE THOSE INTUITIVE LEAPS OF IMAGINATION WHICH ARE THE CORE OF ALL SCIENTIFIC ACHIEVEMENT!
LET US HOPE YOU ARE CORRECT; FOR IT WILL REQUIRE A TRULY FORMIDABLE MIND TO HEAL ME! BEGIN-- SEARCH MY EQUIPMENT FOR THE KEY! I AM TOO WEAK TO RISE!
... BUT I WILL ANSWER QUESTIONS AS LONG AS I CAN!
AND SO REED RICHARDS--MR. FANTASTIC-- BEGINS THE LONG PROCESS OF SEEING JUST HOW FANTASTIC HE IS...
...OCCASIONALLY ASKING QUESTIONS TO WHICH HE HAS ALREADY PARTIALLY GLEANED THE ANSWERS, TESTING, TRYING, PROBING, ALWAYS EXPLORING THE OUTER LIMITS OF KORGON'S TECHNOLOGY!
AND OUTSIDE, AS THE CITIZENS OF THE DOME GATHER TO HOLD VIGIL THROUGHOUT THE LONG NIGHT, THE CRYSTAL WORLD SLOWLY GROWS COLDER...

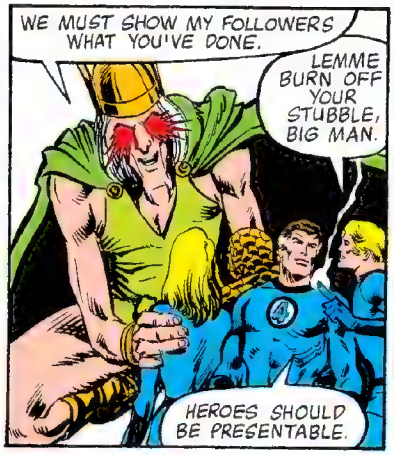

FINALLY, 24 EXHAUSTED HOURS LATER...
IF I CAN DRAIN THE REMAINING ENERGY FROM THE RECEPTACLE BACK INTO KORGON... BUT I NEED SOME KIND OF BACK-UP ENERGY TO INITIATE THE PROCESS...
WOULD HEAT ENERGY TURN THE TRICK, REED?
YES, JOHNNY, THAT'S JUST WHAT I WAS GOING TO--
HEY! OUR POWERS ARE ON THE FRITZ AGAIN! THEY'RE GOING HAYWIRE!
HOLD, OUTSIDERS! WHAT ARE YOU TRYING TO DO?!
WE CAN'T HELP IT! THE RED MIST CAUSED BY KORGON HAS TAKEN CONTROL OF OUR POWERS AWAY FROM US! FURTHERMORE, I'VE FOUND A WAY TO ACCOMPLISH THE TASK--
--BUT WE NEED OUR FULL, NORMAL POWERS!
AS THEY ARE NOW, SOMETHING COULD GO WRONG AT A CRUCIAL POINT IN THE "OPERATION!"
NO! IT IS A TRICK, KORGON! THEY WANT THEIR POWERS SO THEY CAN SLAY YOU AND ESCAPE!
SILENCE, WIGLIF! YOU HAVE ALWAYS BEEN TOO SUSPICIOUS!
HROLF--DO AS THEY REQUEST! CLEANSE THEM!
AS YOU WISH, KORGON! THE NULLIFIER IS ACTIVATED!
AND, AS THE F.F. ARE BATHED IN THE RADIATION-CLEANSING BEAM--
MY POWER IS BACK! I CAN FEEL IT!
HROLF, JUST IN CASE OF TREACHERY, TAKE THE DARKFIELD ROD!
YES, KORGON!
IT WILL NULLIFY THEIR POWERS... COMPLETELY... IF THEY--UHNNN!
A GASP FILLS THE LODGE AS KORGON SLUMPS INTO SILENCE! IS IT TOO LATE? IS THE BLIND GOD ALREADY BEYOND HOPE?

HEAR ME, OUTSIDER! IF--
I HEAR YOU, HROLF! AND THERE'S NO NEED TO WAVE THAT DARKFIELD ROD UNDER MY NOSE.
ALL RIGHT, TEAM-- LET'S GET SET FOR A TRY!
OFF TO THE SIDE, AND OUT OF SIGHT, THE GLOWERING WIGLIF IS UNABLE TO CONTROL HIS EMOTIONS!
ACROSS THE VAST REACHES OF TIME AND SPACE, AT THE FAR END OF BIFROST, THE GLITTERING RAINBOW BRIDGE...
... LIES FABLED ASGARD, HOME OF THE GODS!
WITHIN, THE ALL-FATHER ODIN BROODS UPON HIS GOLDEN THRONE...
SLOWLY, SOFTLY, THE HEAVY SILENCE IS BROKEN BY A SINGLE MURMURED WORD...
...WHILE HIS SON, THE MIGHTY THOR, GAZES THROUGH AN ARCHED WINDOW UPON ETERNAL NIGHT!
LOKI.
"JUST LIKE TREACHEROUS, SCHEMING LOKI... SO MANY TIMES IN THE PAST..."
THOU SPOKE, MY FATHER?
MERELY PONDERING MORTALS WHO ONCE WORSHIPPED US, MY SON, AND WHO HAVE SINCE FOUND A NEW GOD!
PREPARE THYSELF FOR A POSSIBLE ERRAND!
RIGHT THERE IS FINE, BEN-- JUST AS LONG AS IT'S POINTING AT KORGON.
NOW SUE-- IF YOU'LL CONTAIN HIM IN AN INSULATING FORCEFIELD--
AND BEN, YOU LIFT IT INTO THE PATH OF THE RECEPTACLE WHILE I PRIME THE MAIN SWITCH. GOOD, TIME FOR THE HEAT, JOHNNY...
YOU GOT IT, BOSS-MAN. HERE GOES NOTHIN'...

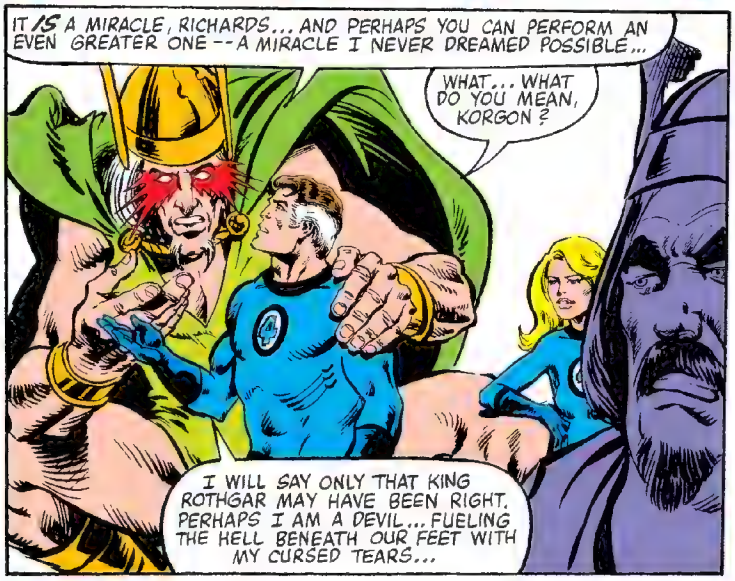

THIS IS IT, THEN -- THE MOMENT OF TRUTH...
BELYING NONE OF THE CRUSHING FATIGUE OF THE PAST DAY AND NIGHT--
-- MR. FANTASTIC RAISES A DELIBERATE, UN-WAVERING HAND TO THE STRANGE DEVICE'S MAIN SWITCH.
WITH INTUITIVE UNDERSTANDING OF THE MACHINE, REED HAS REVERSED ITS FUNCTION.
INSTEAD OF RECEIVING, THE RECEPTACLE GIVES.
AND WHEN THE CRIMSON FLOOD OF ENERGY HAS PERMEATED THE FORCEFIELD...
ALL RIGHT, YOU CAN SET HIM DOWN.
NGH. AIN'T EXACTLY HEAVY, BUT IT SURE IS AWKWARD!
LONG MOMENTS PASS, AND STILL THE BLIND GOD'S EYES REMAIN CLOSED...
REMEMBER KORGON'S WORDS, OUTSIDER. IF YOU'VE FAILED...
...YOU MUST DIE!
WHILE AT THE BAXTER BUILDING...
AUNTIE 'LICIA... I CAN'T STOP THINKIN' ABOUT MOMMY AN' DADDY AN' UNCLE BEN AN' UNCLE JOHNNY...
ARE THEY GONNA BE OKAY?
I DON'T... UH, YES, FRANKLIN... THEY'RE GOING TO BE JUST FINE.
I'M SURE OF IT!
ALICIA MASTERS HAS JUST LIED. BUT THEN, PERHAPS HER BLIND EYES HAVE SEEN MORE, FAR MORE--
--THAN THOSE CURSED WITH MERELY NORMAL SIGHT.
HOLD IT!
YOU'VE GOT TO GIVE IT TIME TO TAKE EFFECT!
DON'T LISTEN TO HIM, HROLF! USE THE ROD TO NULLIFY THEIR POWERS!


THEN WE MAY SLAY THEM AS THE GOD COMMAN--
WAIT! I CAN FEEL MOVEMENT INSIDE THE FORCEFIELD! IT'S KORGON, REED--HE'S COME BACK TO LIFE!
THEN IT WORKED! MY DESPERATE GAMBLE WORKED, SUE! RELEASE YOUR FORCEFIELD--FREE HIM!

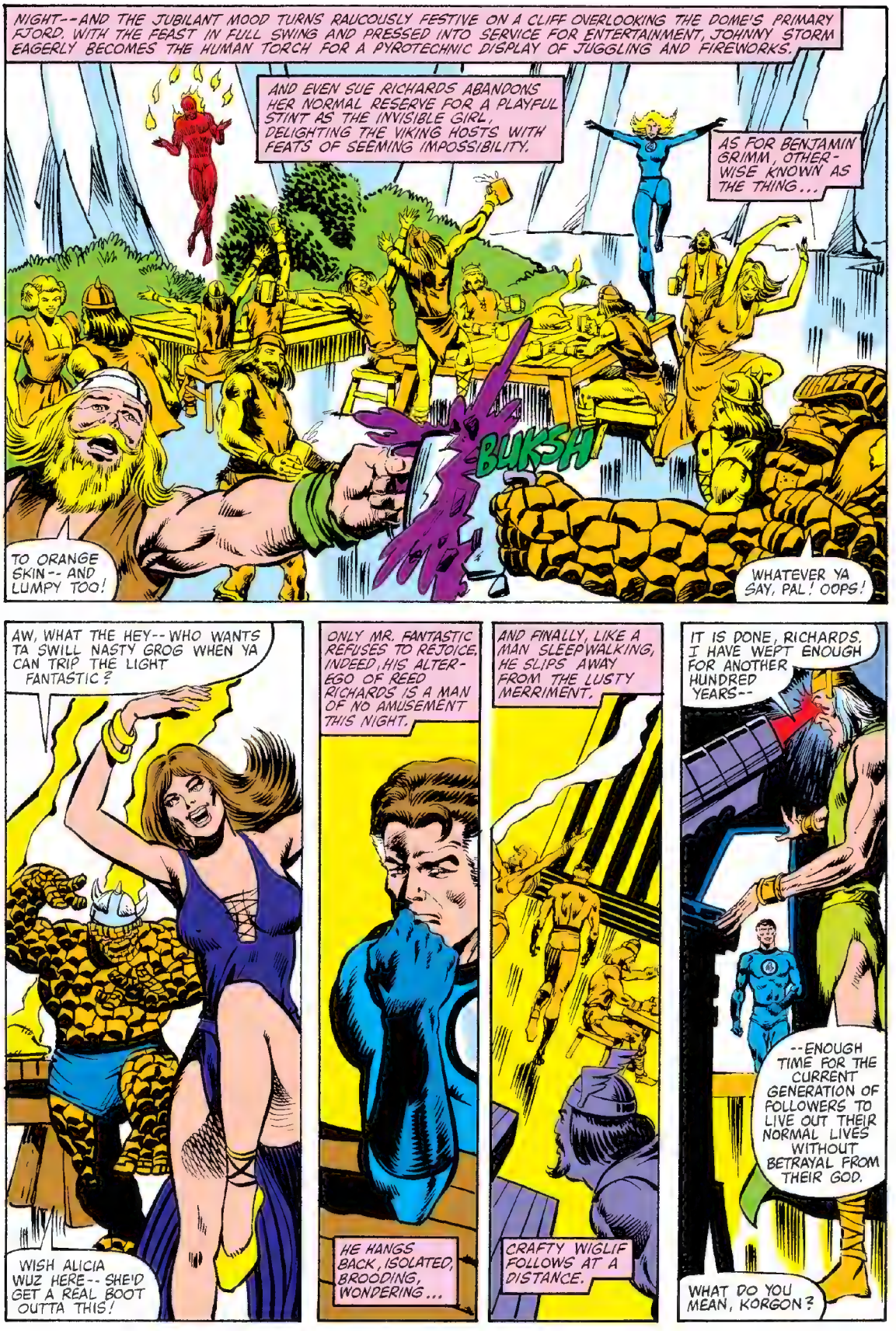
I AM STILL WEAK, RICHARDS, BUT WITH REST AND FURTHER TREATMENTS I'M SURE THERE WILL BE A FULL RECOVERY!
NOW COME--OUTSIDE.


WE MUST SHOW MY FOLLOWERS WHAT YOU'VE DONE.
LEMME BURN OFF YOUR STUBBLE, BIG MAN.
HEROES SHOULD BE PRESENTABLE.

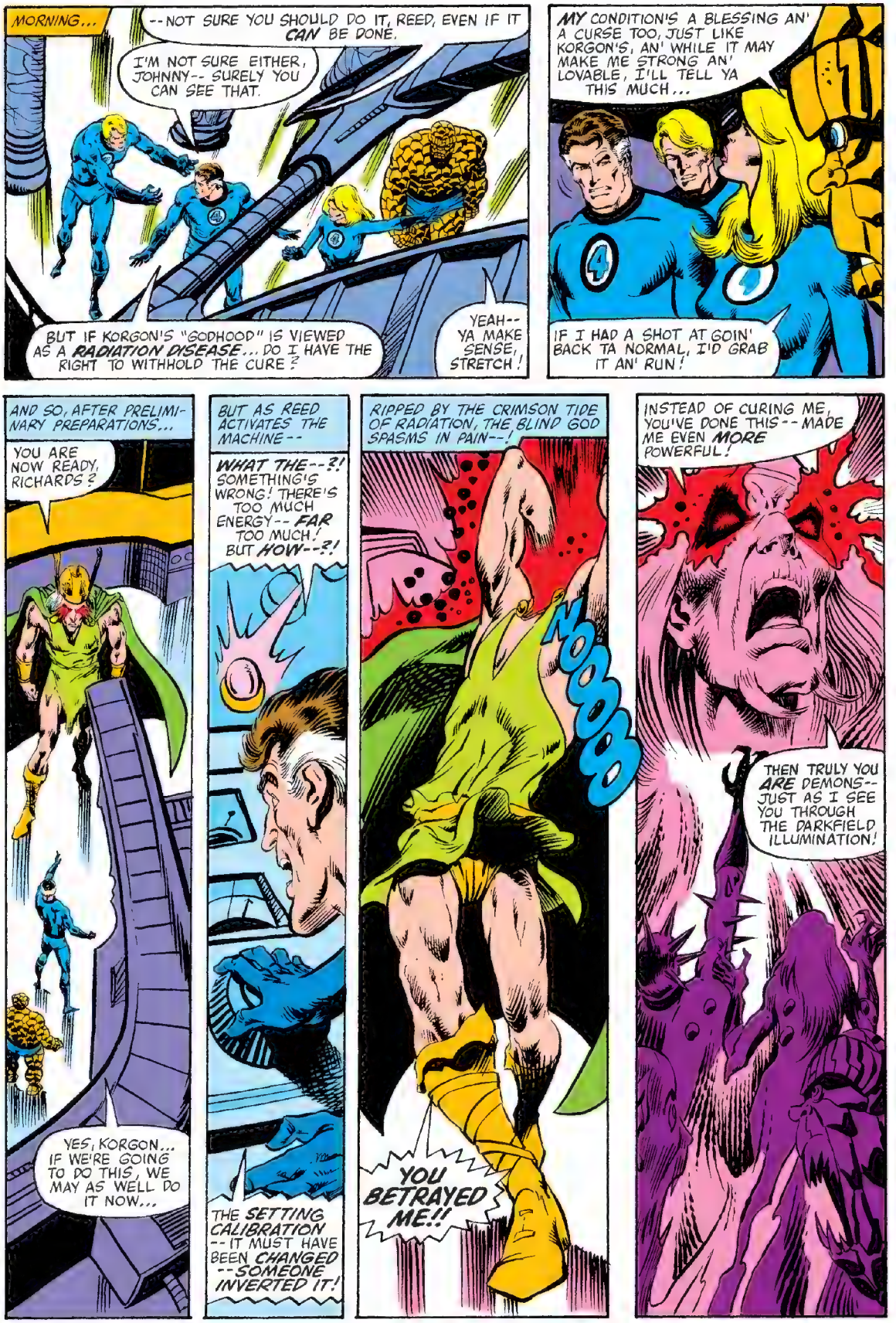
YOUR GOD LIVES--AND TONIGHT I SHALL REPLENISH THE DOME'S ENERGY! PREPARE A CELEBRATION IN HONOR OF OUR GUESTS!
THE GOD LIVES!
A MIRACLE!


IT IS A MIRACLE, RICHARDS... AND PERHAPS YOU CAN PERFORM AN EVEN GREATER ONE--A MIRACLE I NEVER DREAMED POSSIBLE...
WHAT... WHAT DO YOU MEAN, KORGON?
I WILL SAY ONLY THAT KING ROTHGAR MAY HAVE BEEN RIGHT. PERHAPS I AM A DEVIL... FUELING THE HELL BENEATH OUR FEET WITH MY CURSED TEARS...

"COME TO ME TONIGHT, RICHARDS, DURING THE CELEBRATION, AFTER I HAVE REPLENISHED THE ENERGY OF THE DOME... AND WE WILL SPEAK FURTHER."
THE GOD LIVES
LONG LIVE OUT-SIDERS
BUT... WHAT CAN HE MEAN?

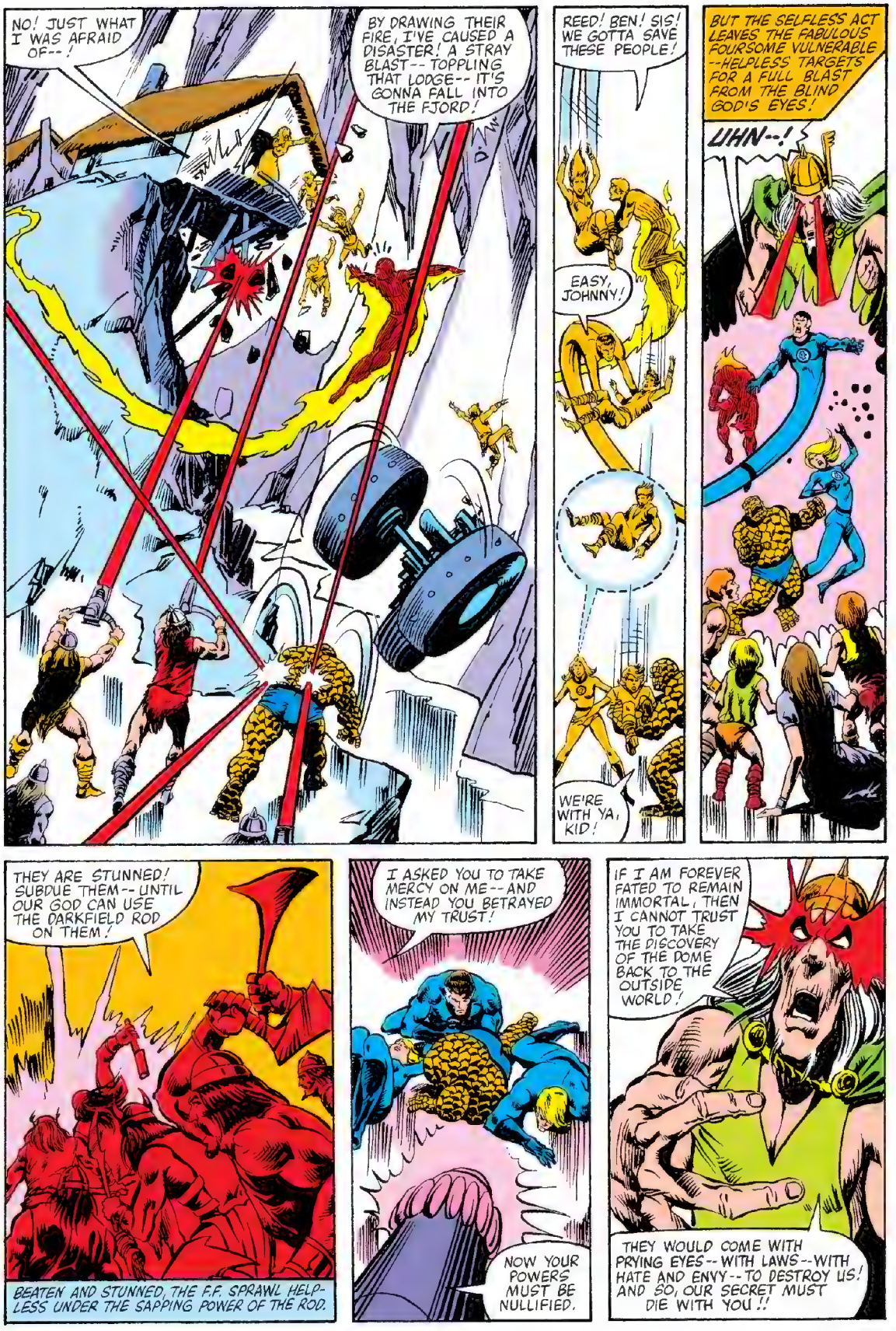

NIGHT--AND THE JUBILANT MOOD TURNS RAUCOUSLY FESTIVE ON A CLIFF OVERLOOKING THE DOME'S PRIMARY FJORD. WITH THE FEAST IN FULL SWING AND PRESSED INTO SERVICE FOR ENTERTAINMENT, JOHNNY STORM EAGERLY BECOMES THE HUMAN TORCH FOR A PYROTECHNIC DISPLAY OF JUGGLING AND FIREWORKS.
AND EVEN SUE RICHARDS ABANDONS HER NORMAL RESERVE FOR A PLAYFUL STINT AS THE INVISIBLE GIRL, DELIGHTING THE VIKING HOSTS WITH FEATS OF SEEMING IMPOSSIBILITY.
AS FOR BENJAMIN GRIMM, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS THE THING...
BUKSH!
TO ORANGE SKIN-- AND LUMPY TOO!
WHATEVER YA SAY, PAL! OOPS!
AW, WHAT THE HEY--WHO WANTS TA SWILL NASTY GROG WHEN YA CAN TRIP THE LIGHT FANTASTIC?
WISH ALICIA WUZ HERE-- SHE'D GET A REAL BOOT OUTTA THIS!
ONLY MR. FANTASTIC REFUSES TO REJOICE. INDEED, HIS ALTER-EGO OF REED RICHARDS IS A MAN OF NO AMUSEMENT THIS NIGHT.
HE HANGS BACK, ISOLATED, BROODING, WONDERING...
AND FINALLY, LIKE A MAN SLEEPWALKING, HE SLIPS AWAY FROM THE LUSTY MERRIMENT.
CRAFTY WIGLIF FOLLOWS AT A DISTANCE.
IT IS DONE, RICHARDS. I HAVE WEPT ENOUGH FOR ANOTHER HUNDRED YEARS--
--ENOUGH TIME FOR THE CURRENT GENERATION OF FOLLOWERS TO LIVE OUT THEIR NORMAL LIVES WITHOUT BETRAYAL FROM THEIR GOD.
WHAT DO YOU MEAN, KORGON?

I HAVE THOUGHT LONG AND HARD, AND HAVE DECIDED TO ATTEMPT THE ULTIMATE "MIRACLE" WITH YOUR HELP.
UNDERSTAND, RICHARDS, THAT I DID NOT ASK TO BE A GOD... AND I AM NOW MORE THAN WEARY OF IMMORTALITY... OF BEING A FREAK... OF SEEING NIGHTMARE VISIONS THROUGH CURSED EYES...
BUT I... I JUST SAVED YOUR LIFE--!
LET ME FINISH, RICHARDS.
I WAS A MAN WHO LOST ALL HUMANITY AND WAS MADE INTO A GOD...
NOW YOU MUST STRIP ME OF GODHOOD AND MAKE ME AGAIN A MAN.
YOU... YOU'RE ASKING ME TO--
TO SLAY A GOD, RICHARDS...
...SO THAT A MAN MAY FINALLY LIVE AND DIE IN PEACE. IS IT POSSIBLE, RICHARDS? CAN YOU DO IT-- REVERSE THE EFFECTS OF THE RADIATION?
WELL... YES... I SUPPOSE IT IS POSSIBLE... RELATIVELY SIMPLE, IN FACT...
I'VE ALREADY REVERSED YOUR MACHINE'S MAIN FUNCTION AND--
THEN DO IT, RICHARDS, PLEASE-- I BEG YOU.
LET ME KNOW ONCE AGAIN HOW IT FEELS... TO WEEP REAL TEARS.
V-VERY WELL, KORGON... WE'LL ATTEMPT IT IN THE MORNING.
THEN, YOU HAVE MY THANKS, RICHARDS... AND MY BLESSING.
UNSEEN, WIGLIF STEALTHILY MOVES TO THE RECEPTACLE OF THE GOD'S TEARS...
HIS BUSY HANDS BEGIN TO WORK.


MORNING...
--NOT SURE YOU SHOULD DO IT, REED, EVEN IF IT CAN BE DONE.
I'M NOT SURE EITHER, JOHNNY-- SURELY YOU CAN SEE THAT.
BUT IF KORGON'S "GODHOOD" IS VIEWED AS A RADIATION DISEASE... DO I HAVE THE RIGHT TO WITHHOLD THE CURE?
YEAH-- YA MAKE SENSE, STRETCH!
MY CONDITION'S A BLESSING AN' A CURSE TOO, JUST LIKE KORGON'S, AN' WHILE IT MAY MAKE ME STRONG AN' LOVABLE, I'LL TELL YA THIS MUCH...
IF I HAD A SHOT AT GOIN' BACK TA NORMAL, I'D GRAB IT AN' RUN!
AND SO, AFTER PRELIMINARY PREPARATIONS...
YOU ARE NOW READY, RICHARDS?
YES, KORGON... IF WE'RE GOING TO DO THIS, WE MAY AS WELL DO IT NOW...
BUT AS REED ACTIVATES THE MACHINE--
WHAT THE--?! SOMETHING'S WRONG! THERE'S TOO MUCH ENERGY-- FAR TOO MUCH! BUT HOW--?!
THE SETTING CALIBRATION --IT MUST HAVE BEEN CHANGED --SOMEONE INVERTED IT!
RIPPED BY THE CRIMSON TIDE OF RADIATION, THE BLIND GOD SPASMS IN PAIN--!
NOOOO
YOU BETRAYED ME!!
INSTEAD OF CURING ME, YOU'VE DONE THIS--MADE ME EVEN MORE POWERFUL!
THEN TRULY YOU ARE DEMONS-- JUST AS I SEE YOU THROUGH THE DARKFIELD ILLUMINATION!

AND IF DEMONS YOU WOULD BE--THEN AS DEMONS YOU MUST BE DESTROYED!
LOOK OUT! GET AWAY FROM HIM! THE RADIATION OVERDOSE HAS DRIVEN HIM MAD --COMPLETELY BERSERK!
AN' IF THAT RED MIST MADE OUR POWERS GO HAYWIRE--
--WHAT'LL HAPPEN IF WE GET TAGGED BY A FULL BLAST?
LOOK! OUR GOD-- BATTLING THE OUTSIDERS-- THE ONES WHO CURED HIM!
BUT WHY--? WHAT HAVE THEY DONE TO HIM?!
EVEN WIGLIF IS STUNNED BY THE RESULT OF HIS SABOTAGE...
I... I DID NOT EXPECT... THIS!
SEIZE THEM! THEY'VE DONE SOMETHING TO KORGON!
AID THE GOD!
AND WITHIN MOMENTS, THE WORLD OF THE CRYSTAL DOME BECOMES A SEETHING BATTLE-GROUND AS THE F.F. ARE FORCED TO DEFEND THEMSELVES AGAINST BOTH A BERSERK GOD AND HIS FRENZIED FOLLOWERS...
JUST IN TIME, SUZIE!
IF YOU HADN'T PUT THIS FORCE-BUBBLE AROUND US, WE'D O' BEEN ZAPPED FULL-FORCE!
BUT WHAT I WANNA KNOW IS-- WHAT NOW?!

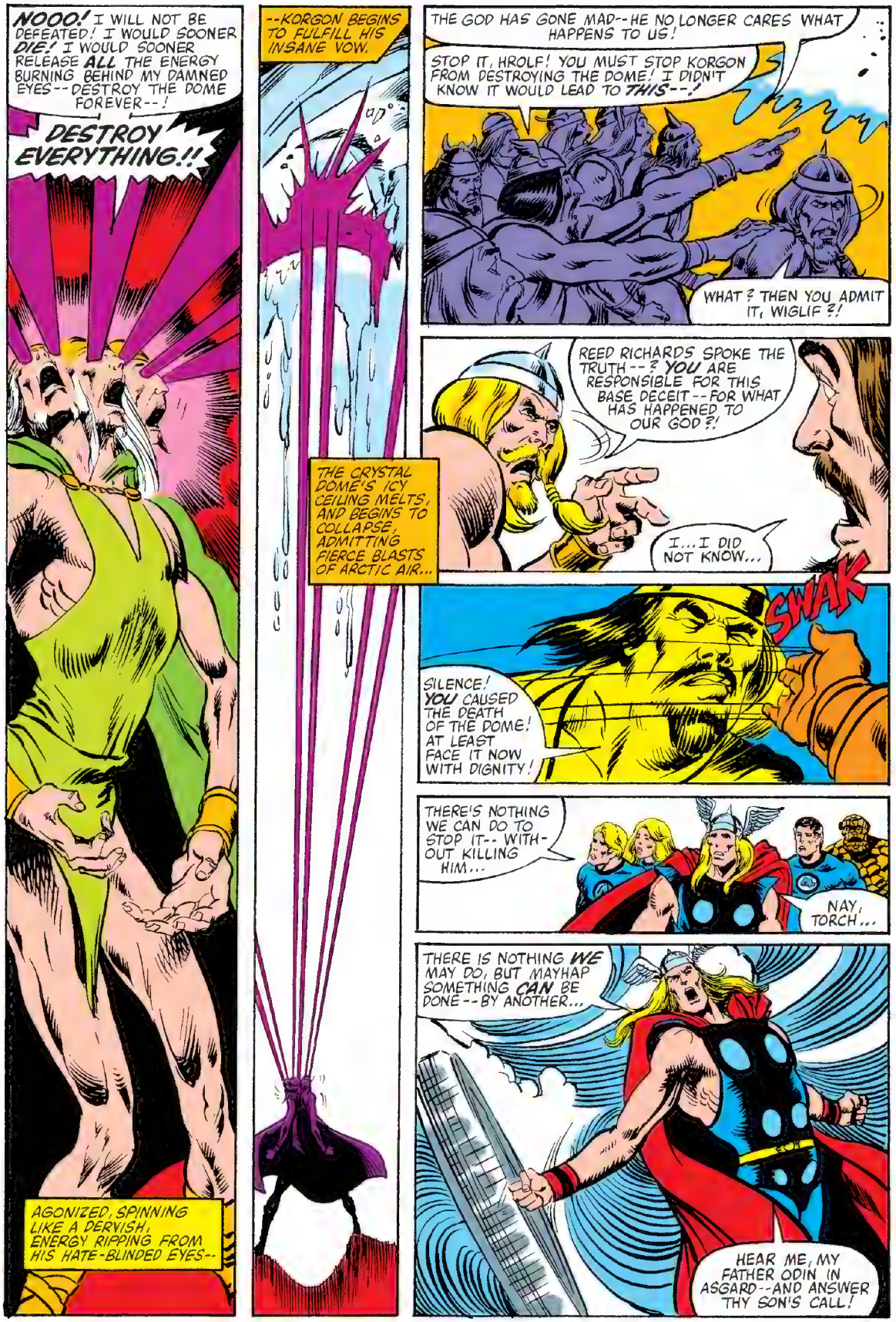
NOW...
...FATE TAKES A HAND, IN THE GUISE OF ALL-SEEING ODIN.
AYE, MY FATHER, IF 'TIS THY WILL, SO SHALL IT BE DONE!
IT IS AS I FEARED, MY SON. EVENTS DEMAND THAT THOU UNDERTAKE THY MISSION.
SO SWEARS THOR THE MIGHTY--GOD OF THUNDER AND FURY!
AND BACK INSIDE THE CRYSTAL DOME OF KORGON...
TELLIN' SUSIE TO DROP HER FORCE-BUBBLE WAS A BIG RISK, STRETCH, BUT I GOTTA ADMIT IT'S PAYIN' OFF! I'VE MANAGED TA TOPPLE KING KORGON HERE AN' IF YOU CAN TAKE OUT HIS FLUNKIES--
WHUMP
NO PROB-LEM THERE, BEN...
SWAK
WAK
WAK
BUT SINCE WE'RE FORCED TO FIGHT DEFENSIVELY, THE MAIN TASK IS TO ELIMINATE THEIR WEAPONRY!
I'M USING MY NOVA-HEAT TO MELT THEIR BIZARRO CANNONS INTO SLAG, REED!
BUT THERE ARE SO MANY OF THE FREAKY THINGS, I'LL NEVER BE ABLE TO HANDLE THEM ALL, AND SOONER OR LATER--

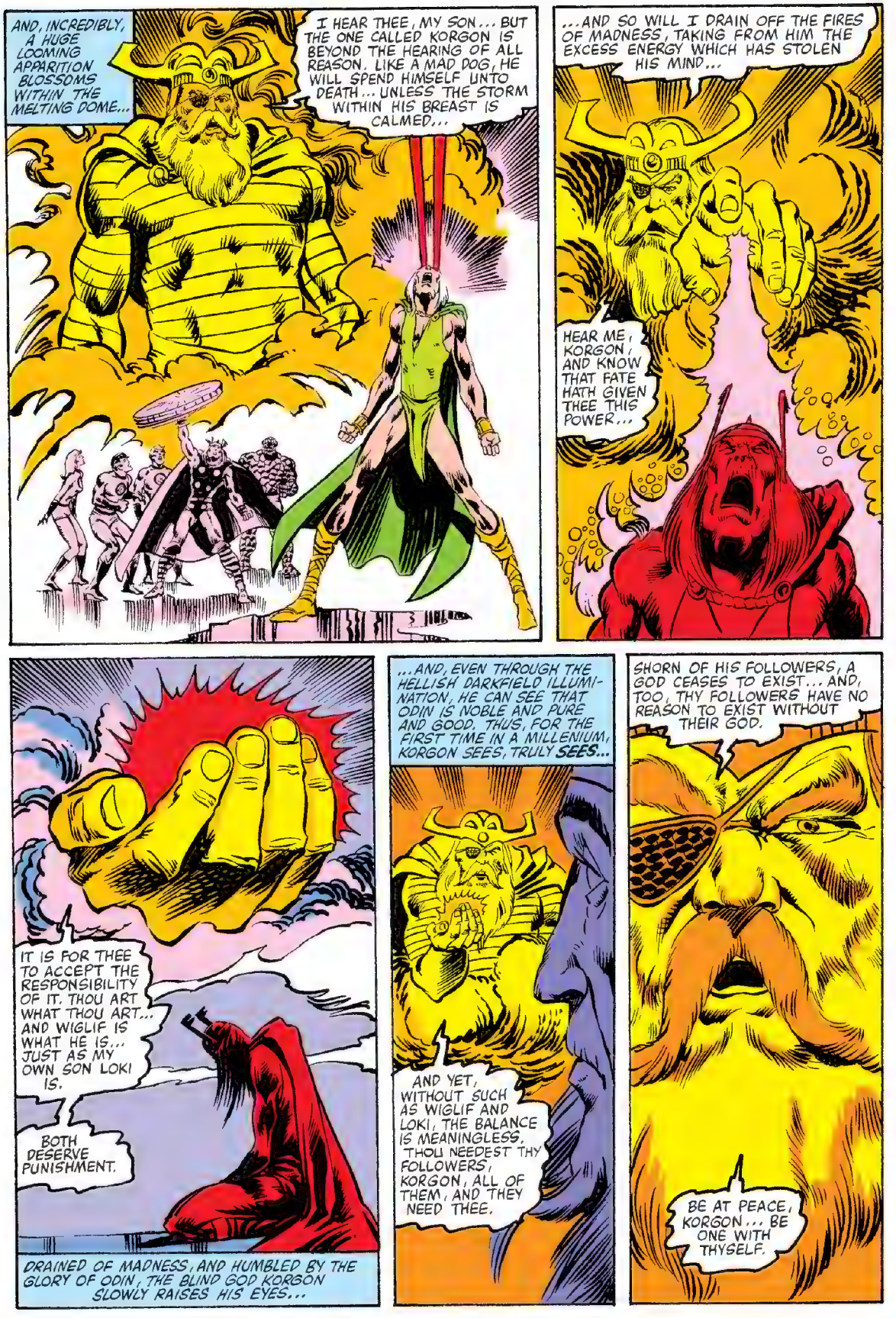

NO! JUST WHAT I WAS AFRAID OF--!
BY DRAWING THEIR FIRE, I'VE CAUSED A DISASTER! A STRAY BLAST-- TOPPLING THAT LODGE-- IT'S GONNA FALL INTO THE FJORD!
REED! BEN! SIS! WE GOTTA SAVE THESE PEOPLE!
EASY, JOHNNY!
WE'RE WITH YA, KID!
BUT THE SELFLESS ACT LEAVES THE FABULOUS FOURSOME VULNERABLE --HELPLESS TARGETS FOR A FULL BLAST FROM THE BLIND GOD'S EYES!
UHN--!
THEY ARE STUNNED! SUBDUE THEM-- UNTIL OUR GOD CAN USE THE DARKFIELD ROD ON THEM!
BEATEN AND STUNNED, THE F.F. SPRAWL HELPLESS UNDER THE SAPPING POWER OF THE ROD.
I ASKED YOU TO TAKE MERCY ON ME-- AND INSTEAD YOU BETRAYED MY TRUST!
NOW YOUR POWERS MUST BE NULLIFIED.
IF I AM FOREVER FATED TO REMAIN IMMORTAL, THEN I CANNOT TRUST YOU TO TAKE THE DISCOVERY OF THE DOME BACK TO THE OUTSIDE WORLD!
THEY WOULD COME WITH PRYING EYES-- WITH LAWS-- WITH HATE AND ENVY-- TO DESTROY US! AND SO, OUR SECRET MUST DIE WITH YOU!!

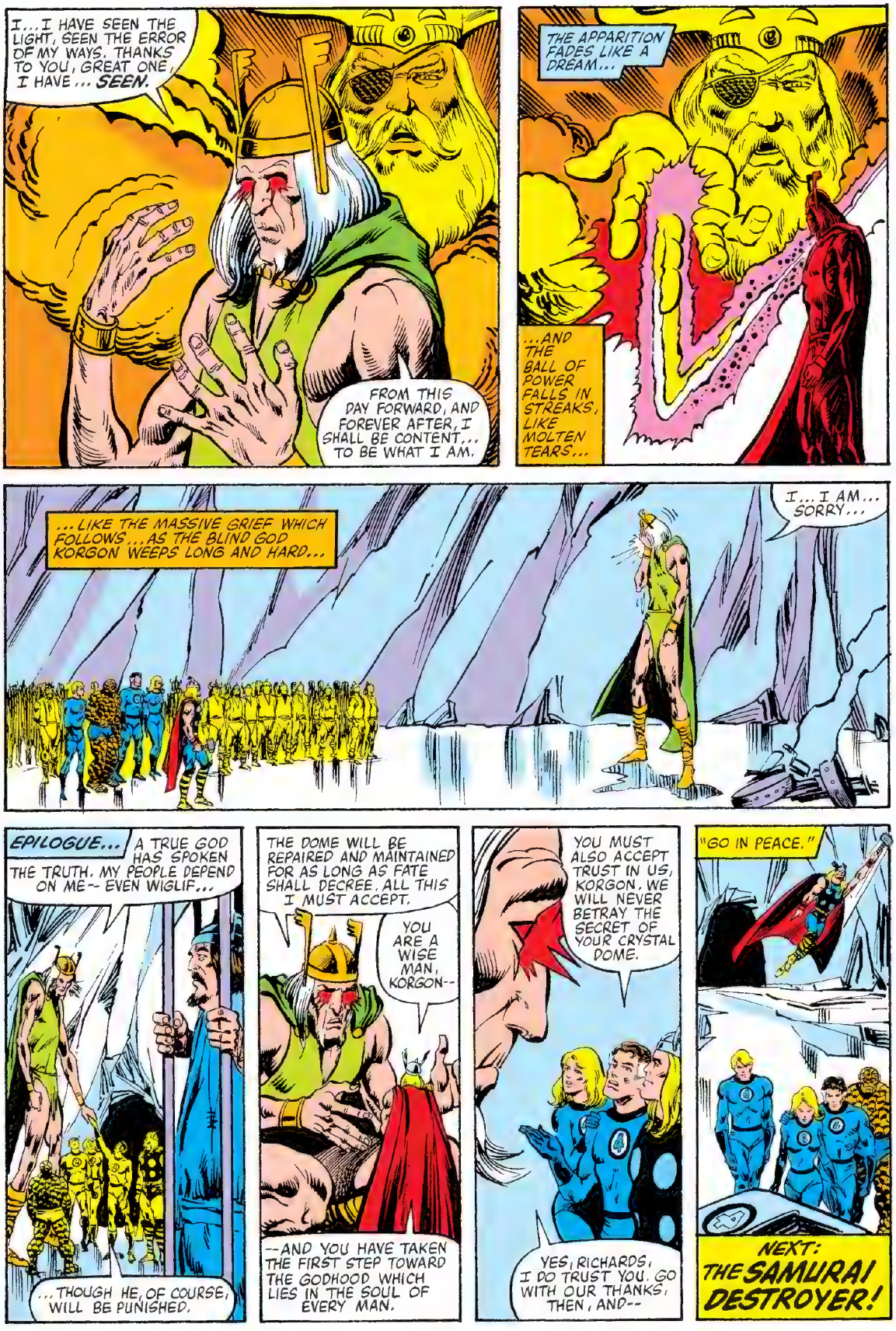
BUT IT... IT WASN'T ME, KORGON! I TRIED-- YOU MUST BELIEVE ME...!
SOMEONE ELSE MUST HAVE TAMPERED WITH, YOUR MACHINE...!
SILENCE, RICHARDS! BY SEALING MY FATE, YOU HAVE SEALED YOUR OWN!
AND NOW, TREACHEROUS INVADERS FROM THE VILE OUTSIDE WORLD, I WILL SLAY YOU WITH MY BARE--
KRAK
WHAT--?!
THE CRYSTAL DOME--! IT... IT IS SHATTERING!
KROOM
ANOTHER BEING WITH GODLIKE POWERS--
--ABLE TO FLY THROUGH THE VERY AIR! BUT WHO--?!
THOR-- IT'S THOR!
HEAR ME, YOU WHO WOULD CALL THYSELF GOD! I HAVE BEEN SENT BY A TRUE GOD-- THE ALL-SEEING GREAT FATHER ODIN!
A GRAVE MISTAKE HAST BEEN COMMITTED HERE UPON THIS DAY...
NO!
I WILL HEAR NO MORE OF GODS! SILENCE HIM!!

SLAY HIM!!
THY WEAPONS CANNOT SLAY THE GOD OF THUNDER, KORGON!
MY FLESH WOULD STAND IMPERVIOUS TO THY BLASTS, EVEN WITHOUT MJOLNIR--
-- MY MYSTIC URU HAMMER!
FRAK
THE DARKFIELD ROD--!
SUE POUNCES ON IT.
I DON'T KNOW IF I'M PRESSING THE RIGHT BUTTONS, SO TELL ME WHEN--
THAT'S IT, SIS.
OUR POWERS ARE RETURNING!
HOLD STILL, SUE--
--WHILE I RETURN THE FAVOR!
AND NOW, MEMBERS OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR--
YES, THOR, WE KNOW.
FLAME ON!!
GET READY, YA BLASTED REJECTS FROM THE LATE SHOW, CUZ ONCE AGAIN IT'S--

--CLOBBERIN' TIME!
THROK
BY THE WAY GOLDILOCKS, THANKS FER THE NICK O' TIME RESCUE!
SAY NO MORE, BENJAMIN GRIMM. THOU HAST COME TO MY AID IN THE PAST.
SPUNCH
AND, TOO, ODIN'S MAJOR CONCERN IN THIS CONFLICT WAS NOT WITH THEE--
"-- BUT WITH THE MAD GOD KORGON."
DOUSE YOUR FLAME JOHNNY-- WHILE I SHIELD YOU!
AND SO THE BATTLE RAGES THROUGH LONG MINUTES OF BIZARRE AND FRANTIC ACTION...
DURING THE MELEE, MOST OF THE VIKINGS' WEAPONRY IS SMASHED OR INCAPACITATED...
...AND BY THE END, ONLY KORGON STANDS WITH ANY POWER TO RESIST. THOR, HOWEVER, QUICKLY SEEKS TO PLACATE THAT BEING...
HEAR ME, KORGON! THERE IS NO NEED FOR FURTHER BATTLE! INDEED, THE PAST STRIFE HAS BEEN CAUSED BY BASE TREACHERY!
LISTEN TO HIM, KORGON-- LISTEN TO REASON!
YOU PLEADED WITH ME LAST NIGHT-- NOW I'M PLEADING WITH YOU! DON'T MAKE US FIGHT ANY MORE!


NOOO! I WILL NOT BE DEFEATED! I WOULD SOONER DIE! I WOULD SOONER RELEASE ALL THE ENERGY BURNING BEHIND MY DAMNED EYES--DESTROY THE DOME FOREVER--!
DESTROY EVERYTHING!!
AGONIZED, SPINNING LIKE A DERVISH, ENERGY RIPPING FROM HIS HATE-BLINDED EYES--
--KORGON BEGINS TO FULFILL HIS INSANE VOW.
THE CRYSTAL DOME'S ICY CEILING MELTS, AND BEGINS TO COLLAPSE, ADMITTING FIERCE BLASTS OF ARCTIC AIR...
THE GOD HAS GONE MAD--HE NO LONGER CARES WHAT HAPPENS TO US!
STOP IT, HROLF! YOU MUST STOP KORGON FROM DESTROYING THE DOME! I DIDN'T KNOW IT WOULD LEAD TO THIS--!
WHAT? THEN YOU ADMIT IT, WIGLIF?!
REED RICHARDS SPOKE THE TRUTH--? YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR THIS BASE DECEIT--FOR WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO OUR GOD?!
I...I DID NOT KNOW...
SWAK
SILENCE! YOU CAUSED THE DEATH OF THE DOME! AT LEAST FACE IT NOW WITH DIGNITY!
THERE'S NOTHING WE CAN DO TO STOP IT--WITHOUT KILLING HIM...
NAY, TORCH...
THERE IS NOTHING WE MAY DO, BUT MAYHAP SOMETHING CAN BE DONE--BY ANOTHER...
HEAR ME, MY FATHER ODIN IN ASGARD--AND ANSWER THY SON'S CALL!


AND, INCREDIBLY, A HUGE LOOMING APPARITION BLOSSOMS WITHIN THE MELTING DOME...
I HEAR THEE, MY SON... BUT THE ONE CALLED KORGON IS BEYOND THE HEARING OF ALL REASON. LIKE A MAD DOG, HE WILL SPEND HIMSELF UNTO DEATH... UNLESS THE STORM WITHIN HIS BREAST IS CALMED...
...AND SO WILL I DRAIN OFF THE FIRES OF MADNESS, TAKING FROM HIM THE EXCESS ENERGY WHICH HAS STOLEN HIS MIND...
HEAR ME, KORGON, AND KNOW THAT FATE HATH GIVEN THEE THIS POWER...
IT IS FOR THEE TO ACCEPT THE RESPONSIBILITY OF IT. THOU ART WHAT THOU ART... AND WIGLIF IS WHAT HE IS... JUST AS MY OWN SON LOKI IS.
BOTH DESERVE PUNISHMENT.
DRAINED OF MADNESS, AND HUMBLED BY THE GLORY OF ODIN, THE BLIND GOD KORGON SLOWLY RAISES HIS EYES...
...AND, EVEN THROUGH THE HELLISH DARKFIELD ILLUMINATION, HE CAN SEE THAT ODIN IS NOBLE AND PURE AND GOOD. THUS, FOR THE FIRST TIME IN A MILLENIUM, KORGON SEES, TRULY SEES...
AND YET, WITHOUT SUCH AS WIGLIF AND LOKI, THE BALANCE IS MEANINGLESS, THOU NEEDEST THY FOLLOWERS, KORGON, ALL OF THEM, AND THEY NEED THEE.
SHORN OF HIS FOLLOWERS, A GOD CEASES TO EXIST... AND, TOO, THY FOLLOWERS HAVE NO REASON TO EXIST WITHOUT THEIR GOD.
BE AT PEACE, KORGON... BE ONE WITH THYSELF.


I... I HAVE SEEN THE LIGHT, SEEN THE ERROR OF MY WAYS. THANKS TO YOU, GREAT ONE, I HAVE... SEEN.
FROM THIS DAY FORWARD, AND FOREVER AFTER, I SHALL BE CONTENT... TO BE WHAT I AM.
THE APPARITION FADES LIKE A DREAM...
...AND THE BALL OF POWER FALLS IN STREAKS, LIKE MOLTEN TEARS...
...LIKE THE MASSIVE GRIEF WHICH FOLLOWS... AS THE BLIND GOD KORGON WEEPS LONG AND HARD...
I... I AM... SORRY...
EPILOGUE... A TRUE GOD HAS SPOKEN THE TRUTH. MY PEOPLE DEPEND ON ME-- EVEN WIGLIF...
...THOUGH HE, OF COURSE, WILL BE PUNISHED.
THE DOME WILL BE REPAIRED AND MAINTAINED FOR AS LONG AS FATE SHALL DECREE. ALL THIS I MUST ACCEPT.
YOU ARE A WISE MAN, KORGON--
--AND YOU HAVE TAKEN THE FIRST STEP TOWARD THE GODHOOD WHICH LIES IN THE SOUL OF EVERY MAN.
YOU MUST ALSO ACCEPT TRUST IN US, KORGON. WE WILL NEVER BETRAY THE SECRET OF YOUR CRYSTAL DOME.
YES, RICHARDS, I DO TRUST YOU. GO WITH OUR THANKS, THEN, AND--
"GO IN PEACE."
NEXT: THE SAMURAI DESTROYER!

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THE WORLD'S GREATEST COMIC MAGAZINE!
Fantastic Four®
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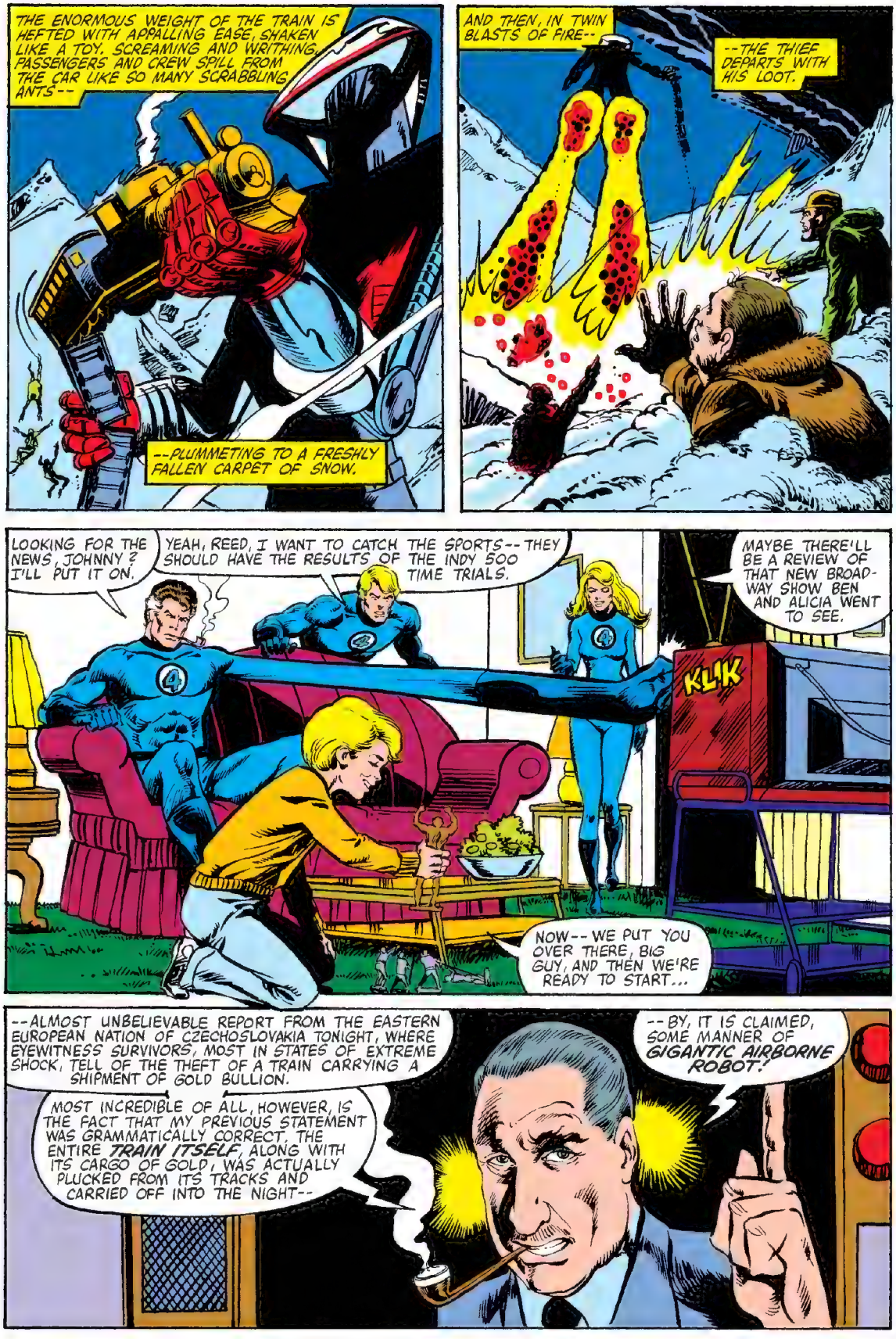
THE F.F. JOURNEY TO JAPAN TO FACE THE SAMAURAI DESTROYER!
FEATURING THE FINAL FATE OF THREE UNEXPECTED GUEST STARS!
SIENKIEWICZ
MACLEOD

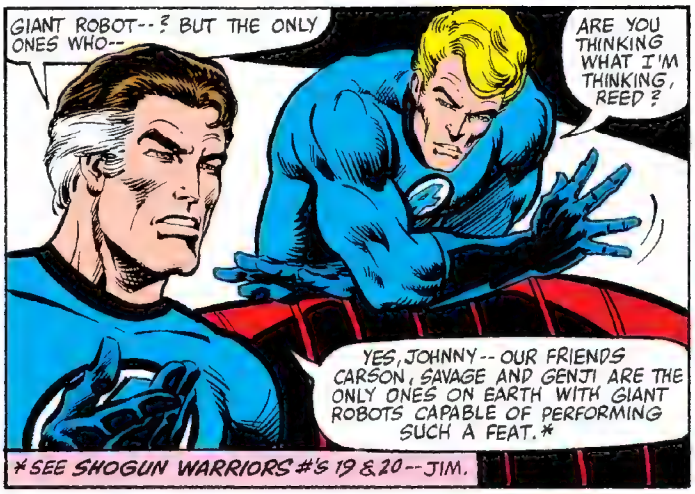
Reed Richards! Ben Grimm! Sue Richards! Johnny Storm! Together they braved the unknown terrors of outer space and were changed into something more than human! MR. FANTASTIC! THE THING! THE INVISIBLE GIRL! THE HUMAN TORCH! And now the world will never again be the same!

Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE FANTASTIC FOUR!®

THE SAMURAI DESTROYER
THE CARPATHIAN MOUNTAINS IN EASTERN EUROPE: RUMBLING AND RACKETING THROUGH DARK TUNNELS AND OVER TRESTLES SPANNING THE VAST MOUNTAIN WILDERNESS, A CZECHOSLOVAKIAN TRAIN IS ABRUPTLY, INCREDIBLY GRABBED--AND LITERALLY RIPPED OFF ITS TRACKS.
ITS CARGO: MORE THAN 70 MILLION DOLLARS' WORTH OF GOLD BULLION.

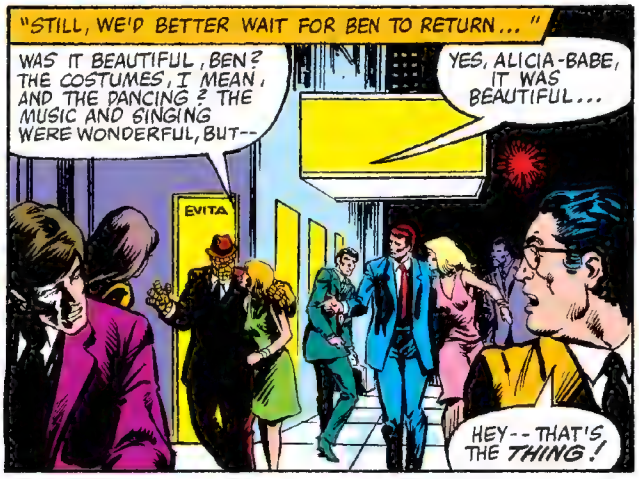
DOUG MOENCH / WRITER | SIENKIEWICZ / ARTIST | MARCOS & PATTERSON / INKERS | JIM NOVAK / LETTERER | GEORGE ROUSSOS / COLORIST | JIM SALICRUP, EDITOR / JIM SHOOTER, ED-IN-CHIEF


THE ENORMOUS WEIGHT OF THE TRAIN IS HEFTED WITH APPALLING EASE, SHAKEN LIKE A TOY. SCREAMING AND WRITHING, PASSENGERS AND CREW SPILL FROM THE CAR LIKE SO MANY SCRABBLING ANTS--
--PLUMMETING TO A FRESHLY FALLEN CARPET OF SNOW.
AND THEN, IN TWIN BLASTS OF FIRE--
--THE THIEF DEPARTS WITH HIS LOOT.
LOOKING FOR THE NEWS, JOHNNY? I'LL PUT IT ON.
YEAH, REED, I WANT TO CATCH THE SPORTS-- THEY SHOULD HAVE THE RESULTS OF THE INDY 500 TIME TRIALS.
MAYBE THERE'LL BE A REVIEW OF THAT NEW BROADWAY SHOW BEN AND ALICIA WENT TO SEE.
KLIK
NOW-- WE PUT YOU OVER THERE, BIG GUY, AND THEN WE'RE READY TO START...
--ALMOST UNBELIEVABLE REPORT FROM THE EASTERN EUROPEAN NATION OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA TONIGHT, WHERE EYEWITNESS SURVIVORS, MOST IN STATES OF EXTREME SHOCK, TELL OF THE THEFT OF A TRAIN CARRYING A SHIPMENT OF GOLD BULLION.
MOST INCREDIBLE OF ALL, HOWEVER, IS THE FACT THAT MY PREVIOUS STATEMENT WAS GRAMMATICALLY CORRECT. THE ENTIRE TRAIN ITSELF, ALONG WITH ITS CARGO OF GOLD, WAS ACTUALLY PLUCKED FROM ITS TRACKS AND CARRIED OFF INTO THE NIGHT--
--BY, IT IS CLAIMED, SOME MANNER OF GIGANTIC AIRBORNE ROBOT!


GIANT ROBOT--? BUT THE ONLY ONES WHO--
ARE YOU THINKING WHAT I'M THINKING, REED?
YES, JOHNNY-- OUR FRIENDS CARSON, SAVAGE AND GENJI ARE THE ONLY ONES ON EARTH WITH GIANT ROBOTS CAPABLE OF PERFORMING SUCH A FEAT.*
*SEE SHOGUN WARRIORS #'S 19 & 20--JIM.

SHOULD WE CHECK ON IT? TWO OF THEM --CARSON AND GENJI--ARE IN CALIFORNIA, AND--
OR SUPPOSEDLY IN CALIFORNIA.
MEANING?
MEANING ONE OF THEM MIGHT BE IN EASTERN EUROPE, SUE--WHERE THAT TRAIN WAS STOLEN.

I DON'T LIKE BEING SUSPICIOUS OF OUR FORMER ALLIES, BUT WE'D BE DERELICT IN OUR DUTY IF WE DIDN'T INVESTIGATE THEM.


"STILL, WE'D BETTER WAIT FOR BEN TO RETURN..."
WAS IT BEAUTIFUL, BEN? THE COSTUMES, I MEAN, AND THE DANCING? THE MUSIC AND SINGING WERE WONDERFUL, BUT--
YES, ALICIA-BABE, IT WAS BEAUTIFUL...
EVITA
HEY--THAT'S THE THING!

...BUT NOWHERE NEAR AS BEAUTIFUL AS YOU. AN' BELIEVE ME, BABE, IF THERE WUZ ANY WAY ON EARTH FER ME TA FIX IT SO'S YOU COULD SEE FOR YERSELF, THE FIRST THING I'D SHOW YA WOULD BE A GREAT BIG MIRROR!
LOOK AT 'EM--THEY'RE LIKE YOUNG LOVERS.
OH, BEN... YOU... YOU'RE ALWAYS SO SWEET TO ME ...AND I APPRECIATE IT MORE THAN YOU CAN KNOW...

...BUT YOU SHOULDN'T EVEN SAY SUCH A FOOLISH THING. THE FIRST THING I'D WANT TO SEE WOULD BE YOU, BEN--ONLY YOU.
NO, BABE, NOT THAT... NOT MY UGLY PUSS.
BELIEVE ME, YOU DESERVE BETTER.

BEN, HOW MANY TIMES MUST I SAY IT? I FELL IN LOVE WITH YOU, NOT THE WAY YOU LOOK... AND NOW THAT I DO LOVE YOU, I LOVE EVERYTHING ABOUT YOU...
AND IF I COULD JUST SEE YOU, I... I'D LOVE AND CHERISH THE SIGHT TOO.
:SNIF: BETTER STOP RIGHT THERE, KID, BEFORE YA GET ME ALL CHOKED--
BRAVO! BRAVO!!
CLAP CLAP
CLAP CLAP
NOW KISS HER, YA BIG LUG!
SHEESH! LOOK AT US -- WE BELONG IN A BLAMED SOAP OPERA!
COME ON, 'LICIA-BABE -- I COULDN'T FACE A RESTAURANT CROWD AT THIS POINT. LET'S GRAB SOMETHIN' TO EAT BACK AT THE BAXTER BUILDING.
CRIPES -- WOTTA PAIR WE MAKE!
YES... WHAT A PAIR. :SNIF:
A MATCH MADE IN... HEAVEN.
WELL, THAT'S THE END OF THE NEWS -- AND NO FURTHER UPDATES ON THE GIANT ROBOT.
KLIK
AND NO REVIEW OF THE SHOW.
BEN'LL TELL US HOW IT IS, SIS. COME ON -- I'LL HELP YOU SET THE TABLE.
...LEAVING REED RICHARDS DEEP IN THOUGHT...
OKAY, WERE-WOLF, YOU GOTTA PLAY GOLIATH NOW -- CUZ THE COWBOY'S GONNA PLAY DAVEY.
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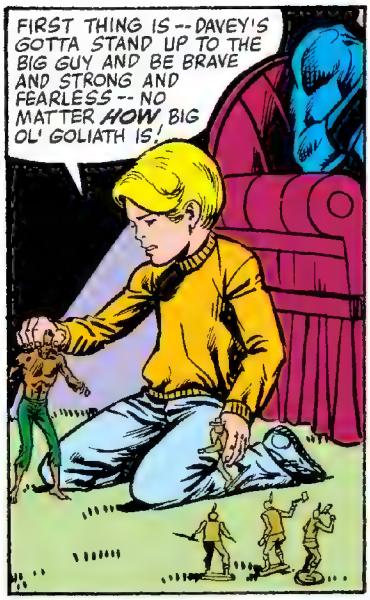
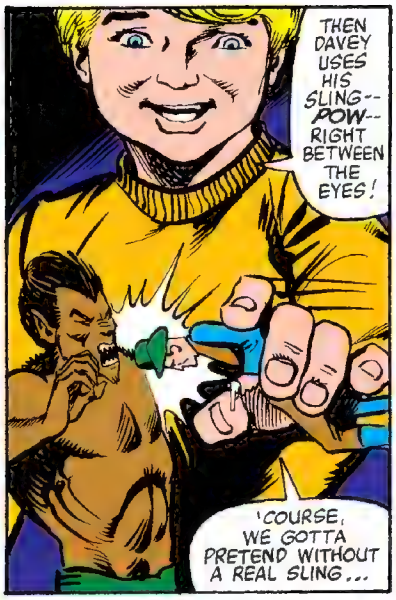
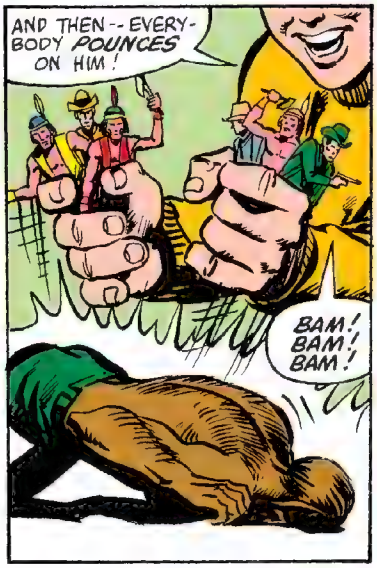
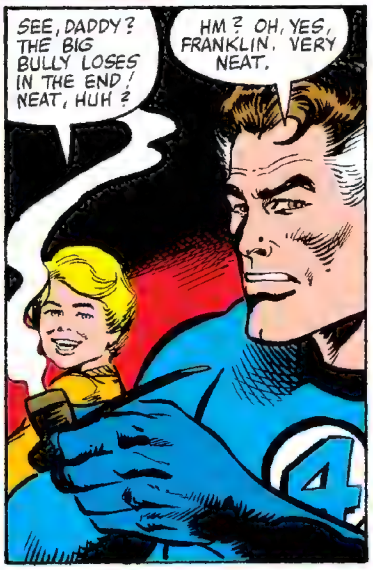
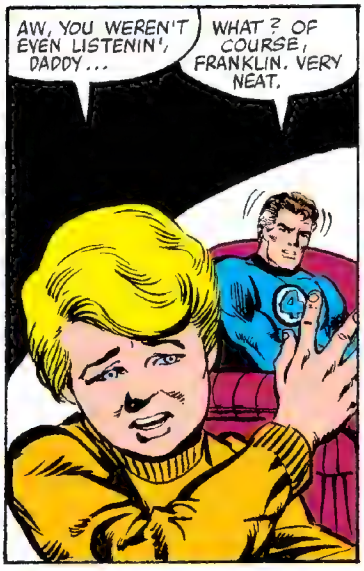

FIRST THING IS -- DAVEY'S GOTTA STAND UP TO THE BIG GUY AND BE BRAVE AND STRONG AND FEARLESS -- NO MATTER HOW BIG OL' GOLIATH IS!


THEN DAVEY USES HIS SLING -- POW -- RIGHT BETWEEN THE EYES!
'COURSE, WE GOTTA PRETEND WITHOUT A REAL SLING...

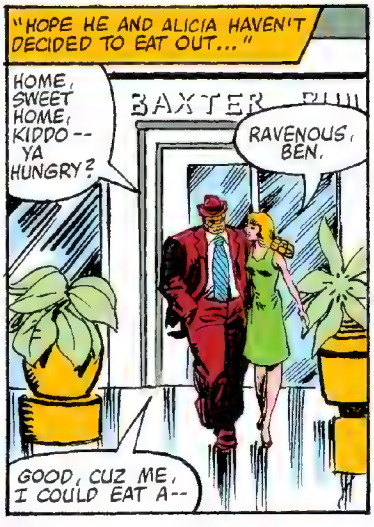
AND THEN, WHILE OLE GOLIATH'S STUNNED, DAVEY'S FRIENDS USE TEAMWORK TO KNOCK HIM DOWN!


AND THEN -- EVERYBODY POUNCES ON HIM!
BAM! BAM! BAM!


SEE, DADDY? THE BIG BULLY LOSES IN THE END! NEAT, HUH?
HM? OH, YES, FRANKLIN. VERY NEAT.

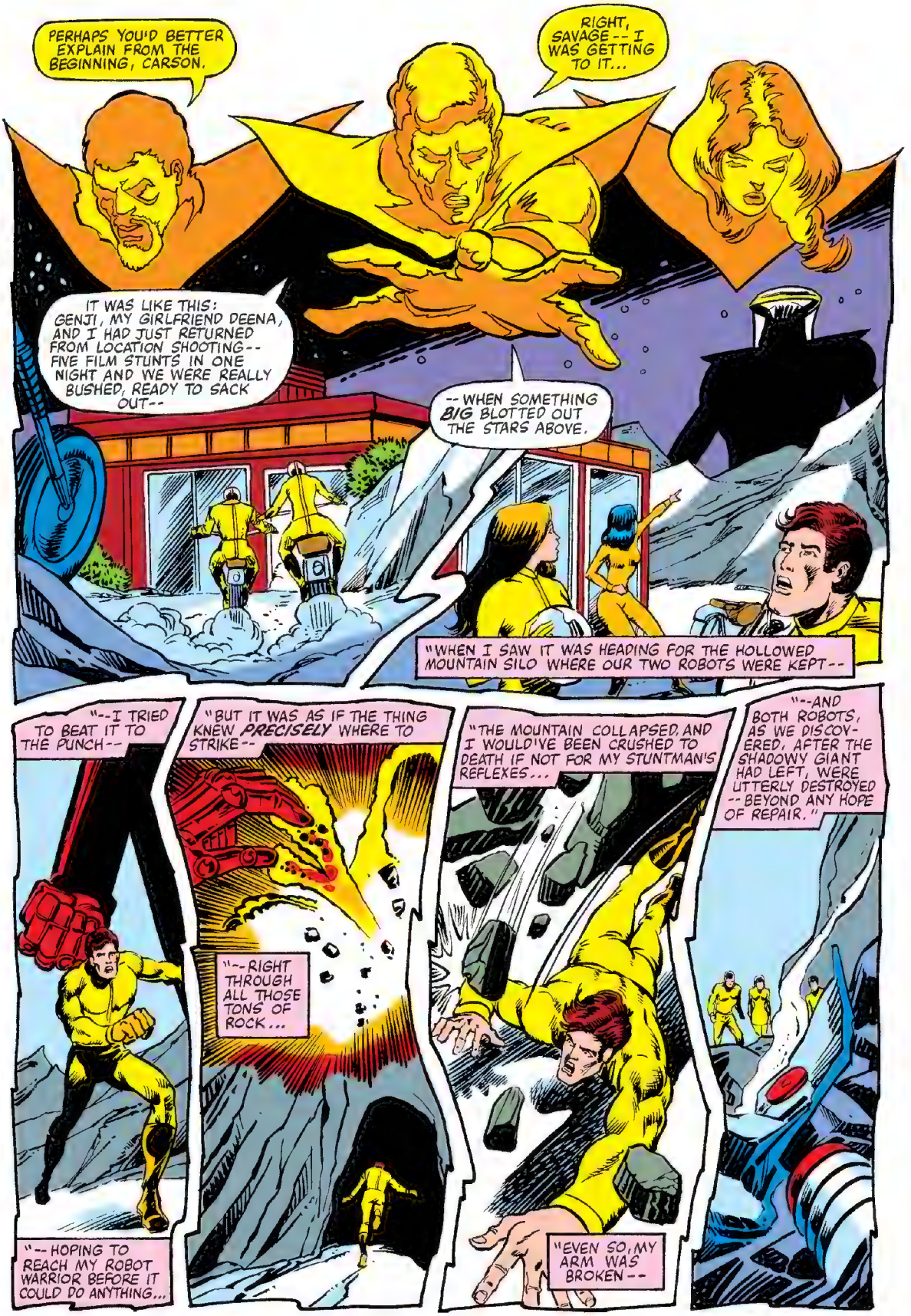

AW, YOU WEREN'T EVEN LISTENIN', DADDY...
WHAT? OF COURSE, FRANKLIN. VERY NEAT.

WISH BEN WOULD GET BACK. THE SHOW LET OUT AN HOUR AGO -- EVEN WALKING, HE SHOULD BE HERE BY NOW...


"HOPE HE AND ALICIA HAVEN'T DECIDED TO EAT OUT..."
HOME, SWEET HOME, KIDDO -- YA HUNGRY?
BAXTER
RAVENOUS, BEN.
GOOD, CUZ ME, I COULD EAT A--

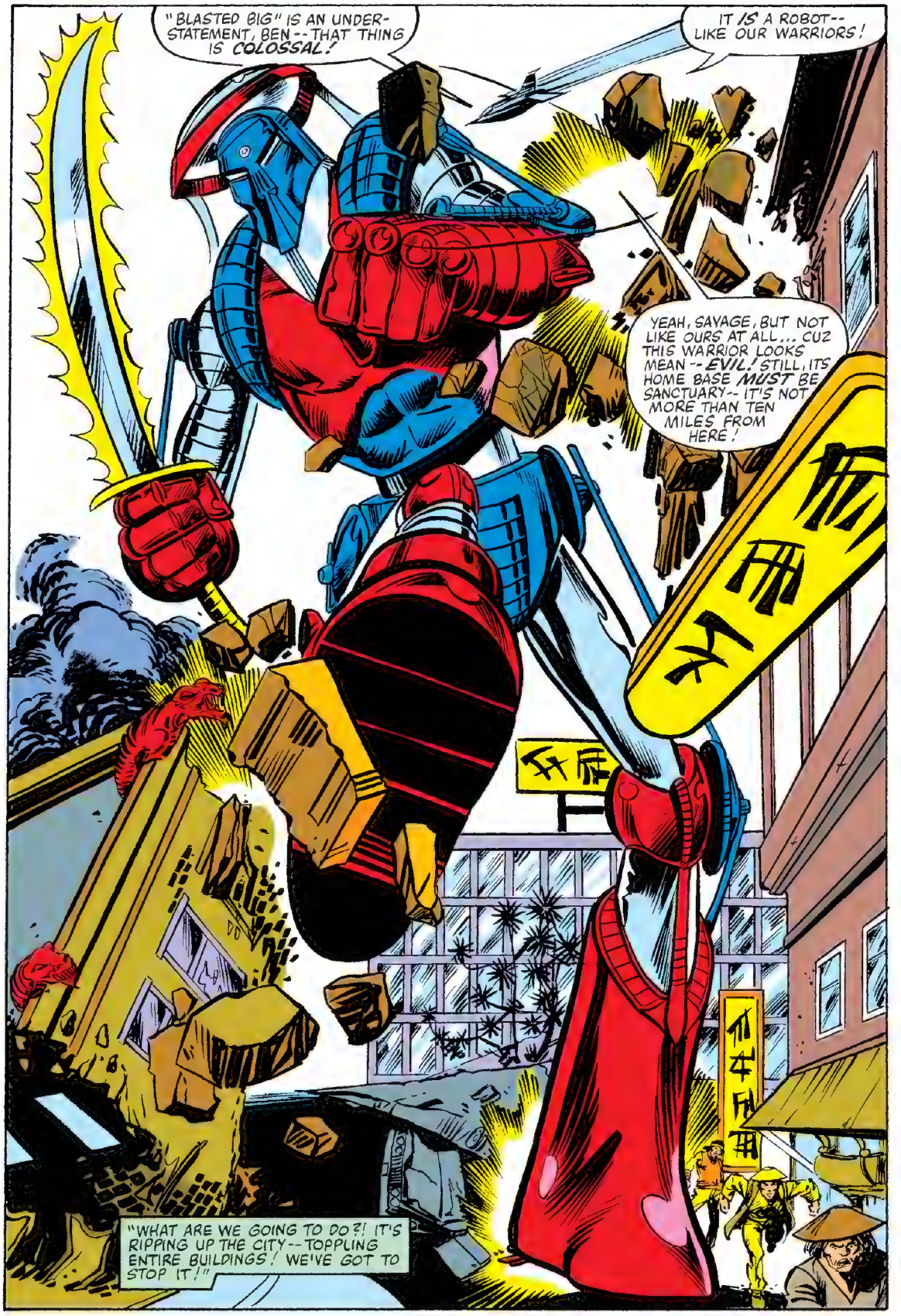
UH OH. LOOKS LIKE WE GOT US A CASE O' THE PROVERBIAL SHADOWY FIGURES LURKIN' BY THE F.F.'S PRIVATE ELEVATOR. IF IT'S ANOTHER BUNCH O' CRUMMY YANCY STREETERS, I'LL...
STAY HERE, 'LICIA-BABE -- WHILE I TAKE CARE O' BUSINESS.

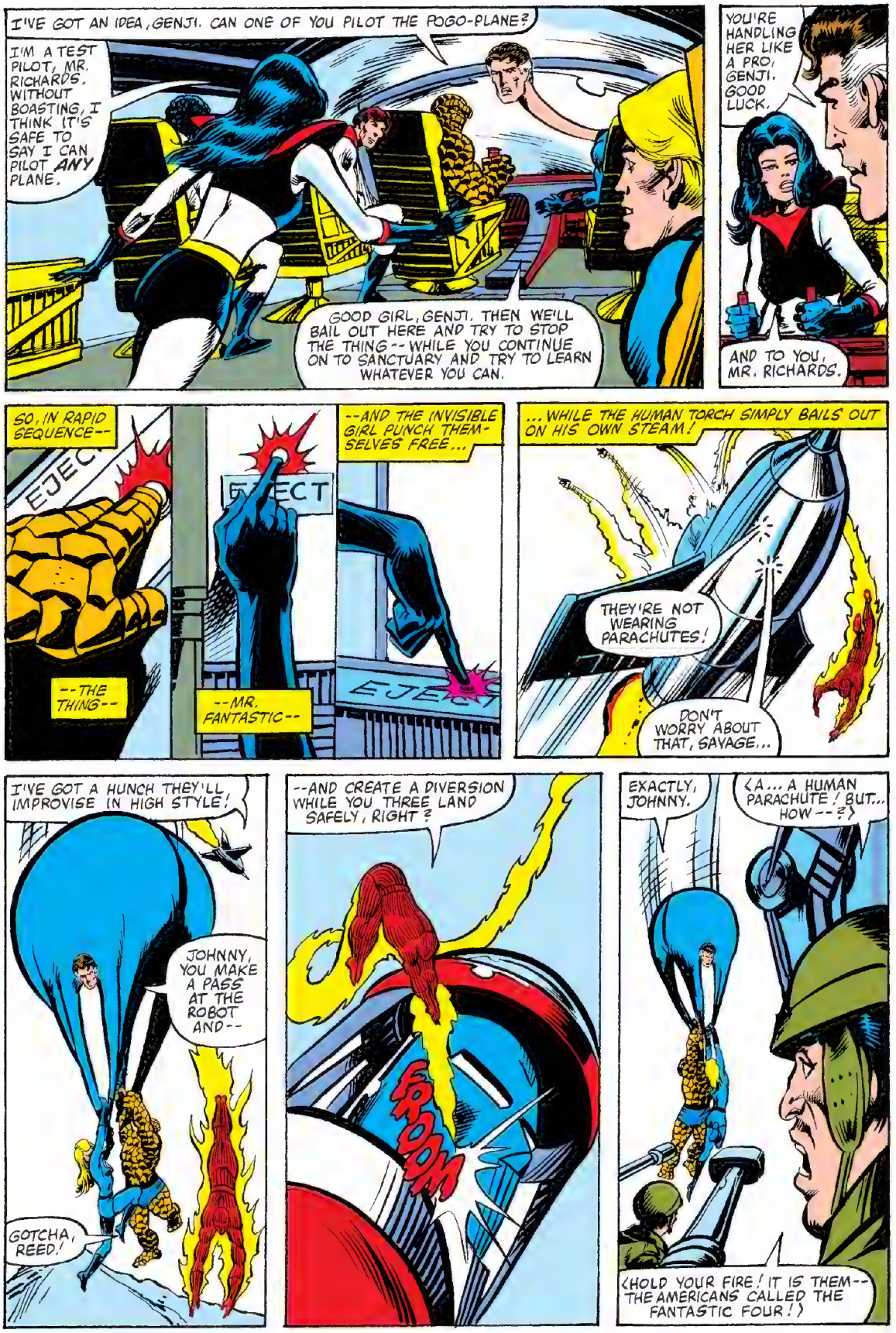
I PRESSED THE BUTTON. WHY WON'T IT WORK?
TRY FORCING THE DOOR OPEN. SOMETIMES THEY GET STUCK...
BAW BAW BAW
SUE! GET FRANKLIN INTO HIS ROOM-- QUICKLY!
THE ALARM, REED-- SOMEONE'S TRYING TO FORCE THEIR WAY INTO OUR PRIVATE ELEVATOR-- BUT WHO COULD IT BE?!
YIPES!!
I DON'T KNOW, JOHNNY-- BUT WHOEVER IT IS, I HOPE THEY HAVEN'T DONE ANYTHING TO BEN!
GOBBLE-GOBBLE.
HUH--?!
GOTCHA, TURKEYS!
HEAR THAT? SOMEONE'S OUT IN THE CORRIDOR-- COMING TOWARD THE DOOR! ALL SET?
YEAH, I'M READY TO FLAME ON IF NEED BE. OPEN IT, REED.
WELL, WELL --BUTLER SERVICE, NO LESS.
BEN--?! BUT WHY DID YOU ACTIVATE THE ALARM?!
WHO--ME? DO I LOOK THAT STUPID, STRETCH? THE BLAMED ALARM WAS SET OFF BY OUR THREE GUESTS BACK HERE...
GUESTS--? BUT WHO--?
ILONGO SAVAGE-- RICHARD CARSON-- AND GENJI ODASHU! WE WERE JUST GOING TO COME SEE YOU--ABOUT THE GIANT ROBOT THAT--
YES, RICHARDS--WE WOULD'VE BEEN THE RIGHT ONES TO CONTACT, ALL RIGHT...
WE'VE HAD INTIMATE DEALINGS WITH THE ROBOT. IN FACT, IT JUST DESTROYED OUR WORLD...
... AND SYSTEMATICALLY SHATTERED ALL THREE OF OUR LIVES.

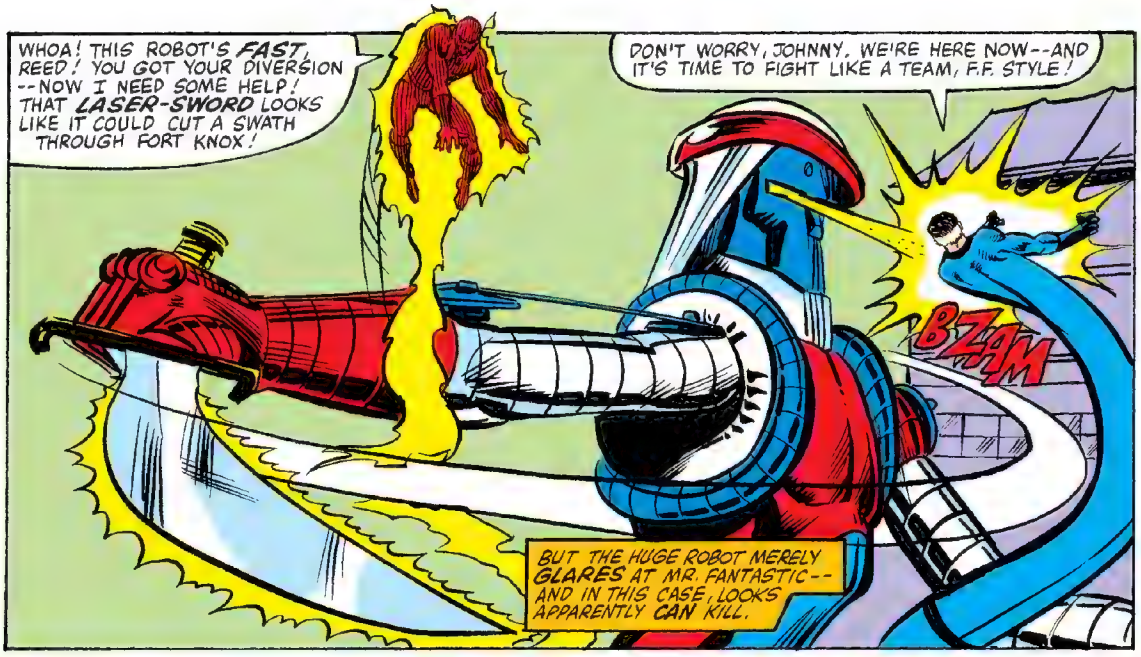

PERHAPS YOU'D BETTER EXPLAIN FROM THE BEGINNING, CARSON.
RIGHT, SAVAGE -- I WAS GETTING TO IT...
IT WAS LIKE THIS: GENJI, MY GIRLFRIEND DEENA, AND I HAD JUST RETURNED FROM LOCATION SHOOTING -- FIVE FILM STUNTS IN ONE NIGHT AND WE WERE REALLY BUSHED, READY TO SACK OUT--
-- WHEN SOMETHING BIG BLOTTED OUT THE STARS ABOVE.
"WHEN I SAW IT WAS HEADING FOR THE HOLLOWED MOUNTAIN SILO WHERE OUR TWO ROBOTS WERE KEPT--
"--I TRIED TO BEAT IT TO THE PUNCH--
"-- HOPING TO REACH MY ROBOT WARRIOR BEFORE IT COULD DO ANYTHING...
"BUT IT WAS AS IF THE THING KNEW PRECISELY WHERE TO STRIKE--
"--RIGHT THROUGH ALL THOSE TONS OF ROCK...
"THE MOUNTAIN COLLAPSED, AND I WOULD'VE BEEN CRUSHED TO DEATH IF NOT FOR MY STUNTMAN'S REFLEXES...
"EVEN SO, MY ARM WAS BROKEN--
"--AND BOTH ROBOTS, AS WE DISCOVERED, AFTER THE SHADOWY GIANT HAD LEFT, WERE UTTERLY DESTROYED -- BEYOND ANY HOPE OF REPAIR."

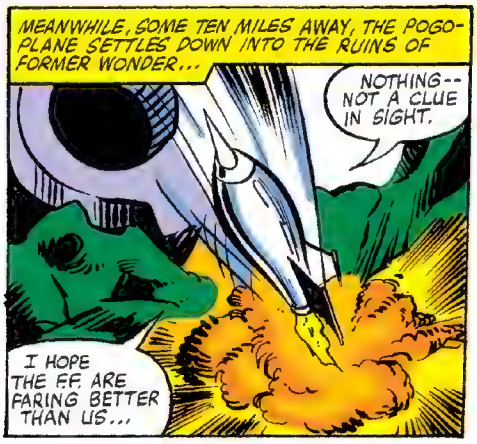
WE CALLED SAVAGE IMMEDIATELY--TO WARN HIM AND ASK FOR HELP.
AND I WENT OUT WITH MY FRIEND AND ASSOCIATE JUDITH TO GET MY ROBOT WARRIOR.
THIS DOESN'T SOUND GOOD...
NO, JOHNNY STORM, IT WASN'T GOOD.
I KEPT MY ROBOT HIDDEN IN A SUBSEA GROTTO ON THE COAST OF MADAGASCAR, NEAR MY MARINE RESEARCH CENTER... BUT AS WE APPROACHED, I COULD SEE THAT SOMETHING WAS WRONG. THE WATER WAS TURBULENT -- BOILING...
"AND INSIDE THE GROTTO ...I DISCOVERED THAT THE MYSTERIOUS GIANT DESTROYER HAD ALREADY BEEN THERE.
"MY ROBOT WAS UNRECOGNIZABLE."
WE DECIDED TO FLY TO NEW YORK, MEET AT KENNEDY AIRPORT, AND COME TO THE FANTASTIC FOUR FOR HELP. YOU'D AIDED US IN THE PAST, SO WE THOUGHT--
CERTAINLY, GENJI, BUT... YOU SAID THE ROBOTS ARE COMPLETELY DESTROYED, BEYOND REPAIR...
WE REALIZE YOU CAN'T HELP US IN THAT RESPECT, RICHARDS. NOBODY CAN BRING BACK WHAT'S DEAD. BUT EVEN IF OUR OLD LIVES ARE GONE FOREVER, CANCELED IN TWO SWIFT MOVES--
--THERE'S STILL ONE LAST PIECE OF BUSINESS TO SETTLE--STOPPING THE THING WHICH STOPPED US AND--
FRANKLIN, TURN THAT RADIO--
WE INTERRUPT WITH THIS SPECIAL NEWS BULLETIN...
WAIT, FRANKLIN--DON'T TURN IT DOWN YET!
RADAR HAS LOCATED A GIGANTIC AERIAL OBJECT IN THE FAR EAST NEAR MOUNT FUJIMOTO...THOUGHT TO BE THE ROBOT RESPONSIBLE FOR THE TRAIN THEFT AND SEVERAL OTHER RECENT ATTACKS...

MOUNT FUJIMOTO--! THAT'S NEAR THE SANCTUARY! DO YOU THINK--
THERE MAY BE SOME SPARE PARTS REMAINING AT SANCTUARY, BUT... AN ENTIRE NEW ROBOT--?
IT'S WORTH A CHECK. LET'S GO!
ALICIA, WILL YOU STAY HERE WITH FRANKLIN WHILE--
CERTAINLY, SUE. HE'LL BE FINE.
LEFT BEHIND, AGAIN. SO LONG, GANG.
AND SO, MINUTES LATER THE F.F.'S FABULOUS POGO-PLANE STREAKS TOWARD THE FAR EAST...
ABOARD ARE THE FOUR NORMAL CREW--
--AND THREE DISCONSOLATE PASSENGERS...
I... STILL CAN'T BELIEVE IT...
I KNOW WHAT YOU MEAN, GENJI. I FEEL AS IF MY WHOLE WORLD HAS ENDED...
WE'VE BEEN THROUGH SOME HEAVY SCENES, ALL RIGHT...
FIRST THE DESTRUCTION OF SANCTUARY...
"...THEN THE DEATHS OF OUR MENTORS, THE FOLLOWERS OF THE LIGHT..."
...AND NOW THIS, THE FINAL LOSS -- OUR ROBOT WARRIORS GONE, AS IF THEY NEVER EXISTED...
I GUESS WE JUST HAVE TO GET USED TO IT.
MAYBE THE FOLLOWERS' TIME IS PAST. MAYBE OUR CAREERS AS AGENTS OF THE LIGHT JUST WEREN'T MEANT TO BE...
HEADS UP, TROOPS!
SOMETHIN' BLASTED BIG IS HAPPENIN' IN THAT CITY UP AHEAD!


"BLASTED BIG" IS AN UNDER-STATEMENT, BEN--THAT THING IS COLOSSAL!
IT IS A ROBOT--LIKE OUR WARRIORS!
YEAH, SAVAGE, BUT NOT LIKE OURS AT ALL... CUZ THIS WARRIOR LOOKS MEAN--EVIL! STILL, ITS HOME BASE MUST BE SANCTUARY--IT'S NOT MORE THAN TEN MILES FROM HERE!
"WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO?! IT'S RIPPING UP THE CITY--TOPPLING ENTIRE BUILDINGS! WE'VE GOT TO STOP IT!"

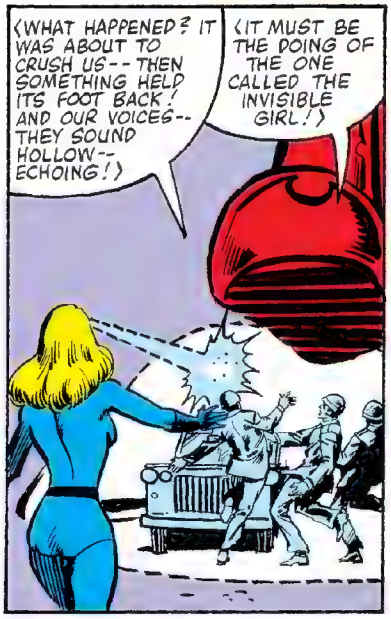

I'VE GOT AN IDEA, GENJI. CAN ONE OF YOU PILOT THE POGO-PLANE?
I'M A TEST PILOT, MR. RICHARDS. WITHOUT BOASTING, I THINK IT'S SAFE TO SAY I CAN PILOT ANY PLANE.
GOOD GIRL, GENJI. THEN WE'LL BAIL OUT HERE AND TRY TO STOP THE THING -- WHILE YOU CONTINUE ON TO SANCTUARY AND TRY TO LEARN WHATEVER YOU CAN.
YOU'RE HANDLING HER LIKE A PRO, GENJI. GOOD LUCK.
AND TO YOU, MR. RICHARDS.
SO, IN RAPID SEQUENCE--
EJECT
--THE THING--
--MR. FANTASTIC--
--AND THE INVISIBLE GIRL PUNCH THEMSELVES FREE...
...WHILE THE HUMAN TORCH SIMPLY BAILS OUT ON HIS OWN STEAM!
THEY'RE NOT WEARING PARACHUTES!
DON'T WORRY ABOUT THAT, SAVAGE...
I'VE GOT A HUNCH THEY'LL IMPROVISE IN HIGH STYLE!
JOHNNY, YOU MAKE A PASS AT THE ROBOT AND--
GOTCHA, REED!
--AND CREATE A DIVERSION WHILE YOU THREE LAND SAFELY, RIGHT?
FROOM
EXACTLY, JOHNNY.
<A... A HUMAN PARACHUTE! BUT... HOW--?>
<HOLD YOUR FIRE! IT IS THEM-- THE AMERICANS CALLED THE FANTASTIC FOUR!>
EJECT


WHOA! THIS ROBOT'S FAST, REED! YOU GOT YOUR DIVERSION --NOW I NEED SOME HELP! THAT LASER-SWORD LOOKS LIKE IT COULD CUT A SWATH THROUGH FORT KNOX!
DON'T WORRY, JOHNNY, WE'RE HERE NOW--AND IT'S TIME TO FIGHT LIKE A TEAM, F.F. STYLE!
BZAM
BUT THE HUGE ROBOT MERELY GLARES AT MR. FANTASTIC-- AND IN THIS CASE, LOOKS APPARENTLY CAN KILL.


MEANWHILE, SOME TEN MILES AWAY, THE POGO-PLANE SETTLES DOWN INTO THE RUINS OF FORMER WONDER...
NOTHING-- NOT A CLUE IN SIGHT.
I HOPE THE F.F. ARE FARING BETTER THAN US...

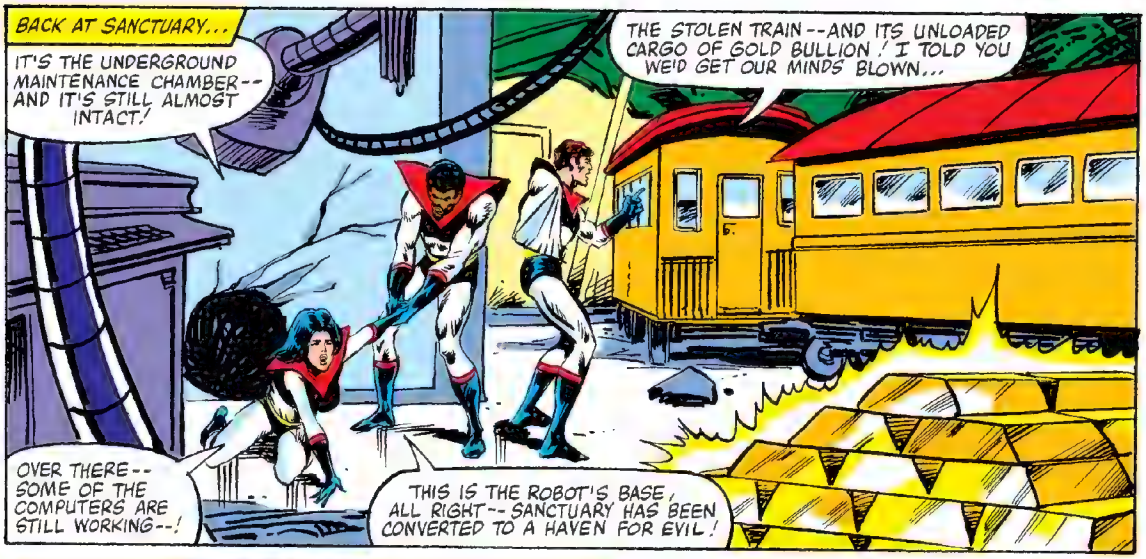
WISH I COULD TALK JAPANESE, AT LEAST ENOUGH TO SAY: "OUTTA MY WAY, COPPER-- CUZ IT'S CLOBBERIN' TIME!"
KLONG
SHEESH! NOT EVEN A DENT--IN ANY LANGUAGE!

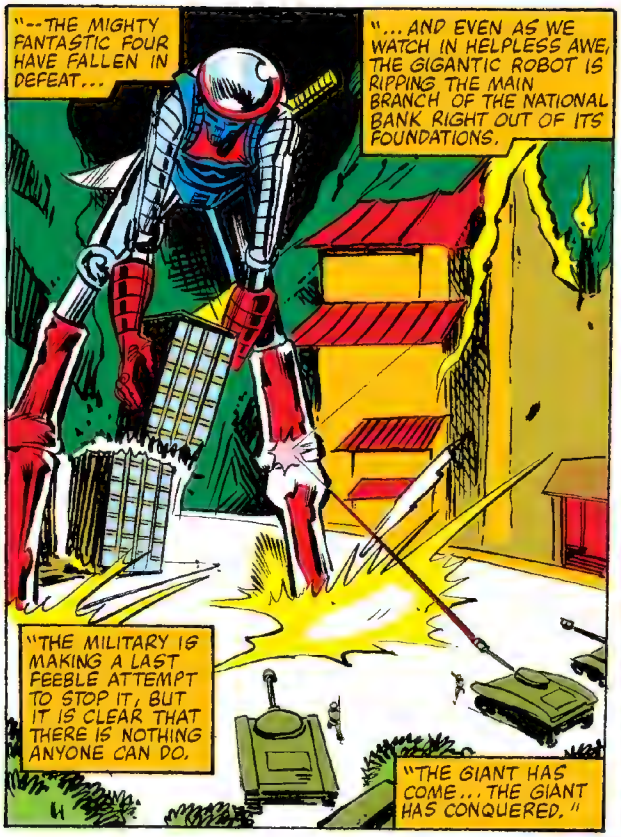
WELL, IF WE CAN'T FIND ANYTHING ON THE OUTSIDE, WE'LL JUST HAVE TO SEARCH INSIDE THE RUINS.
COME ON-- I SEE AN OPENING!

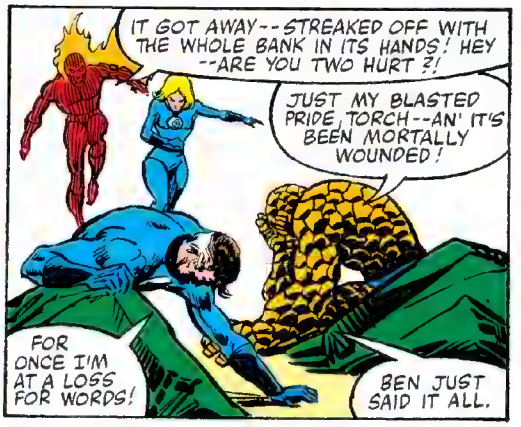

〈WHAT HAPPENED? IT WAS ABOUT TO CRUSH US-- THEN SOMETHING HELD ITS FOOT BACK! AND OUR VOICES-- THEY SOUND HOLLOW-- ECHOING!〉
〈IT MUST BE THE DOING OF THE ONE CALLED THE INVISIBLE GIRL!〉

HERE'S AN OPENING IN THE SHATTERED STONE--AND I BET WE'RE GONNA FIND SOME REAL MIND-BLOWERS INSIDE!

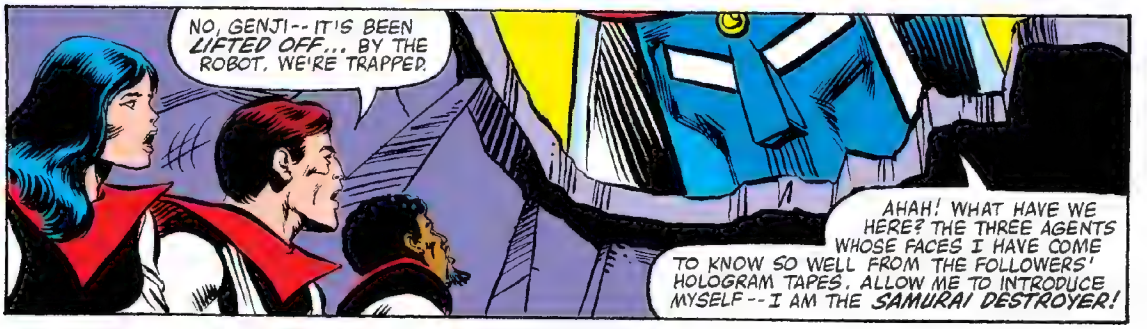
〈--SEE THE SCENE BEHIND ME, ENGULFED IN FIRE AND DESTRUCTION--A SCENE WHICH EVEN THE POWERFUL MEMBERS OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR SEEM UNABLE TO ALTER.〉
〈INDEED, THE GIGANTIC ROBOT IS REACTING TO THEIR ATTACK AS YOU OR I WOULD REACT TO ANNOYING INSECTS!〉

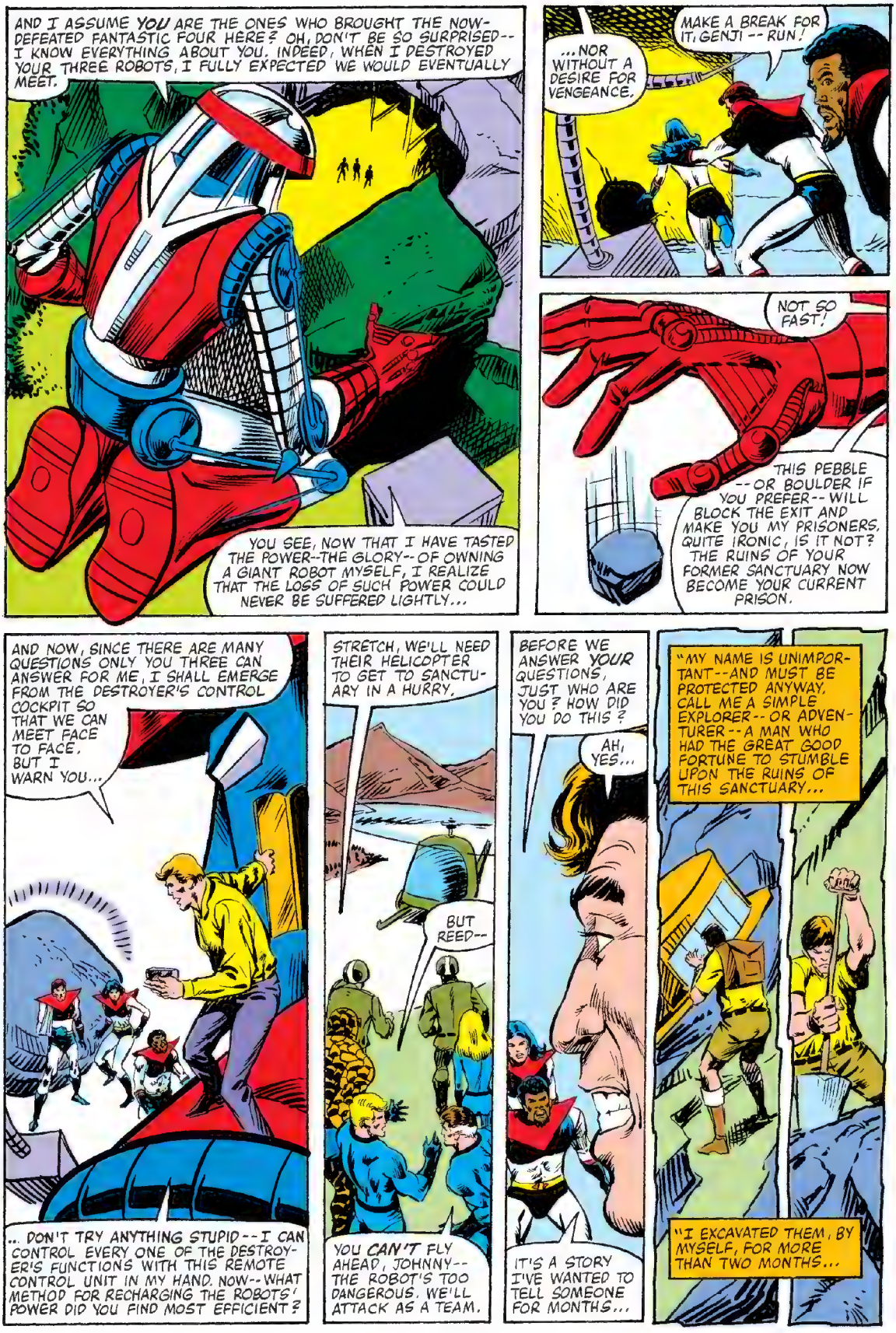

BACK AT SANCTUARY...
IT'S THE UNDERGROUND MAINTENANCE CHAMBER--AND IT'S STILL ALMOST INTACT!
THE STOLEN TRAIN--AND ITS UNLOADED CARGO OF GOLD BULLION! I TOLD YOU WE'D GET OUR MINDS BLOWN...
OVER THERE--SOME OF THE COMPUTERS ARE STILL WORKING--!
THIS IS THE ROBOT'S BASE, ALL RIGHT--SANCTUARY HAS BEEN CONVERTED TO A HAVEN FOR EVIL!

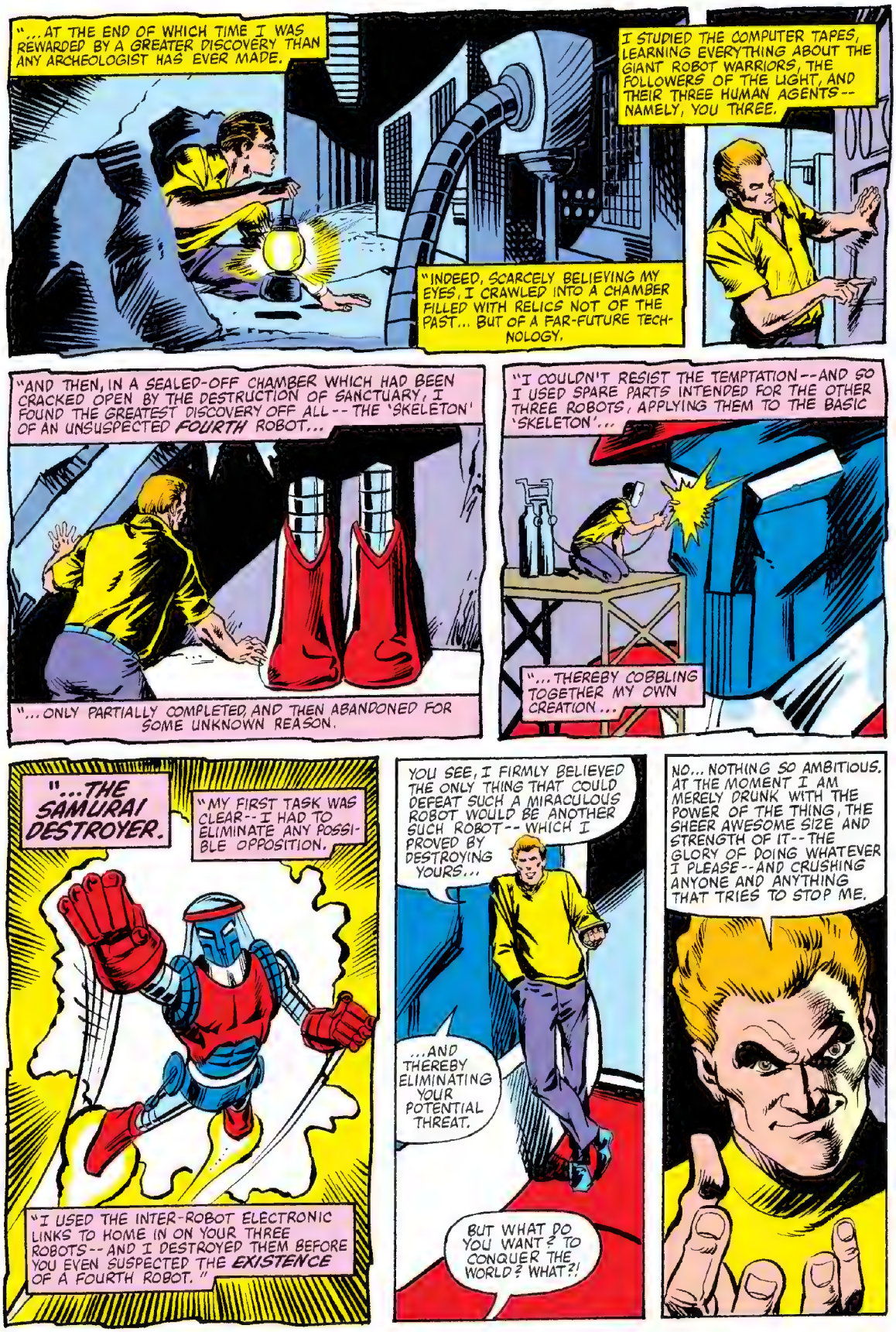

"--THE MIGHTY FANTASTIC FOUR HAVE FALLEN IN DEFEAT...
"...AND EVEN AS WE WATCH IN HELPLESS AWE, THE GIGANTIC ROBOT IS RIPPING THE MAIN BRANCH OF THE NATIONAL BANK RIGHT OUT OF ITS FOUNDATIONS.
"THE MILITARY IS MAKING A LAST FEEBLE ATTEMPT TO STOP IT, BUT IT IS CLEAR THAT THERE IS NOTHING ANYONE CAN DO.
"THE GIANT HAS COME... THE GIANT HAS CONQUERED."

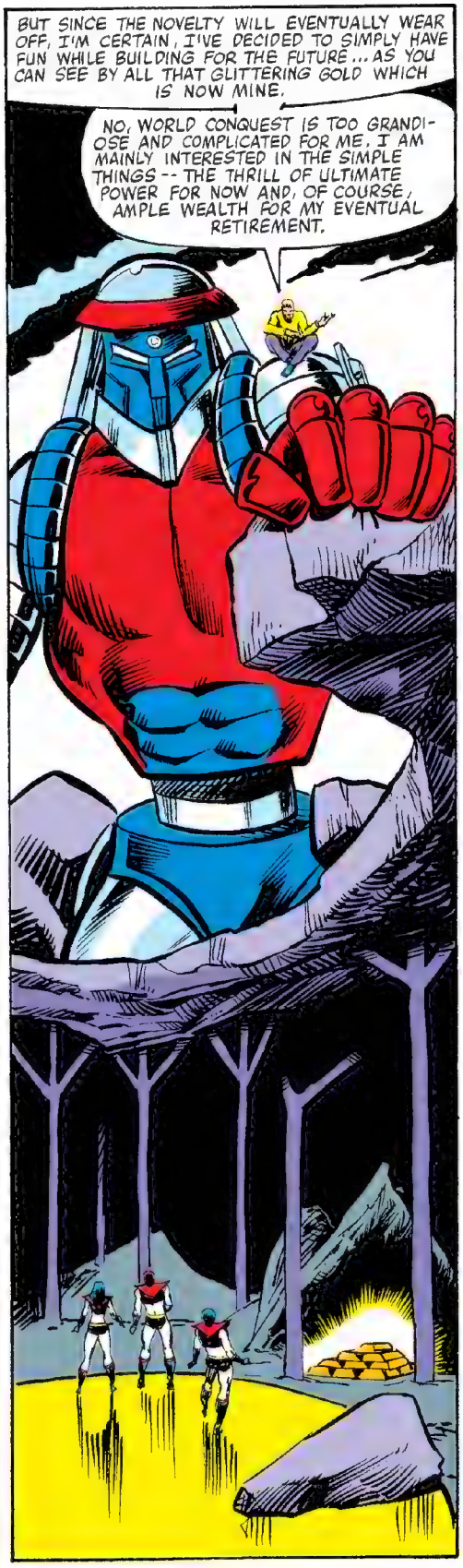

IT GOT AWAY--STREAKED OFF WITH THE WHOLE BANK IN ITS HANDS! HEY--ARE YOU TWO HURT?!
JUST MY BLASTED PRIDE, TORCH--AN' IT'S BEEN MORTALLY WOUNDED!
FOR ONCE I'M AT A LOSS FOR WORDS!
BEN JUST SAID IT ALL.

NOTHING WE CAN DO HERE--BETTER LEAVE AND TELL THE F.F. WHAT WE'VE FOUND!
WAIT! THE CEILING--! IT'S SHIFTING--ABOUT TO COLLAPSE!

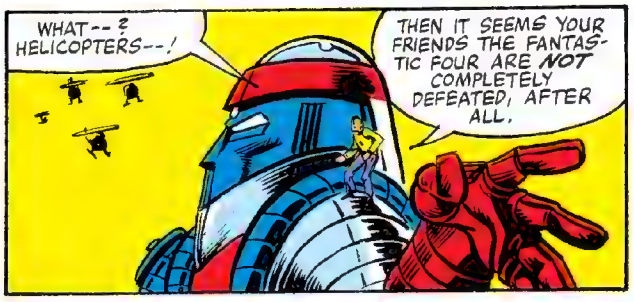

NO, GENJI--IT'S BEEN LIFTED OFF... BY THE ROBOT. WE'RE TRAPPED.
AHAH! WHAT HAVE WE HERE? THE THREE AGENTS WHOSE FACES I HAVE COME TO KNOW SO WELL FROM THE FOLLOWERS' HOLOGRAM TAPES. ALLOW ME TO INTRODUCE MYSELF--I AM THE SAMURAI DESTROYER!

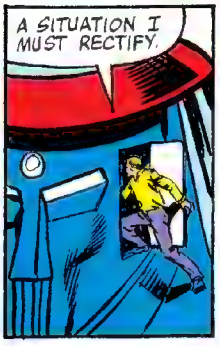

AND I ASSUME YOU ARE THE ONES WHO BROUGHT THE NOW-DEFEATED FANTASTIC FOUR HERE? OH, DON'T BE SO SURPRISED--I KNOW EVERYTHING ABOUT YOU. INDEED, WHEN I DESTROYED YOUR THREE ROBOTS, I FULLY EXPECTED WE WOULD EVENTUALLY MEET.
YOU SEE, NOW THAT I HAVE TASTED THE POWER--THE GLORY--OF OWNING A GIANT ROBOT MYSELF, I REALIZE THAT THE LOSS OF SUCH POWER COULD NEVER BE SUFFERED LIGHTLY...
...NOR WITHOUT A DESIRE FOR VENGEANCE.
MAKE A BREAK FOR IT, GENJI -- RUN!
NOT SO FAST!
THIS PEBBLE --OR BOULDER IF YOU PREFER-- WILL BLOCK THE EXIT AND MAKE YOU MY PRISONERS, QUITE IRONIC, IS IT NOT? THE RUINS OF YOUR FORMER SANCTUARY NOW BECOME YOUR CURRENT PRISON.
AND NOW, SINCE THERE ARE MANY QUESTIONS ONLY YOU THREE CAN ANSWER FOR ME, I SHALL EMERGE FROM THE DESTROYER'S CONTROL COCKPIT SO THAT WE CAN MEET FACE TO FACE. BUT I WARN YOU...
... DON'T TRY ANYTHING STUPID--I CAN CONTROL EVERY ONE OF THE DESTROYER'S FUNCTIONS WITH THIS REMOTE CONTROL UNIT IN MY HAND. NOW--WHAT METHOD FOR RECHARGING THE ROBOTS' POWER DID YOU FIND MOST EFFICIENT?
STRETCH, WE'LL NEED THEIR HELICOPTER TO GET TO SANCTUARY IN A HURRY.
BUT REED--
YOU CAN'T FLY AHEAD, JOHNNY--THE ROBOT'S TOO DANGEROUS. WE'LL ATTACK AS A TEAM.
BEFORE WE ANSWER YOUR QUESTIONS, JUST WHO ARE YOU? HOW DID YOU DO THIS?
AH, YES...
IT'S A STORY I'VE WANTED TO TELL SOMEONE FOR MONTHS...
"MY NAME IS UNIMPORTANT--AND MUST BE PROTECTED ANYWAY. CALL ME A SIMPLE EXPLORER--OR ADVENTURER--A MAN WHO HAD THE GREAT GOOD FORTUNE TO STUMBLE UPON THE RUINS OF THIS SANCTUARY...
"I EXCAVATED THEM, BY MYSELF, FOR MORE THAN TWO MONTHS...

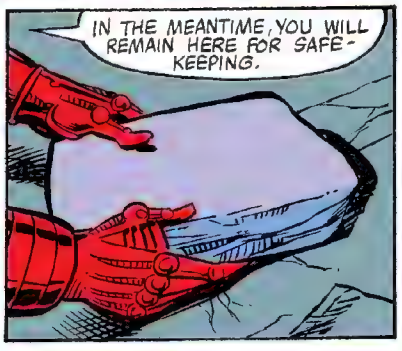

"...AT THE END OF WHICH TIME I WAS REWARDED BY A GREATER DISCOVERY THAN ANY ARCHEOLOGIST HAS EVER MADE.
"INDEED, SCARCELY BELIEVING MY EYES, I CRAWLED INTO A CHAMBER FILLED WITH RELICS NOT OF THE PAST... BUT OF A FAR-FUTURE TECHNOLOGY.
I STUDIED THE COMPUTER TAPES, LEARNING EVERYTHING ABOUT THE GIANT ROBOT WARRIORS, THE FOLLOWERS OF THE LIGHT, AND THEIR THREE HUMAN AGENTS--NAMELY, YOU THREE.
"AND THEN, IN A SEALED-OFF CHAMBER WHICH HAD BEEN CRACKED OPEN BY THE DESTRUCTION OF SANCTUARY, I FOUND THE GREATEST DISCOVERY OFF ALL--THE 'SKELETON' OF AN UNSUSPECTED FOURTH ROBOT...
"...ONLY PARTIALLY COMPLETED, AND THEN ABANDONED FOR SOME UNKNOWN REASON.
"I COULDN'T RESIST THE TEMPTATION--AND SO I USED SPARE PARTS INTENDED FOR THE OTHER THREE ROBOTS, APPLYING THEM TO THE BASIC 'SKELETON'...
"...THEREBY COBBLING TOGETHER MY OWN CREATION...
"...THE SAMURAI DESTROYER.
"MY FIRST TASK WAS CLEAR--I HAD TO ELIMINATE ANY POSSIBLE OPPOSITION.
"I USED THE INTER-ROBOT ELECTRONIC LINKS TO HOME IN ON YOUR THREE ROBOTS--AND I DESTROYED THEM BEFORE YOU EVEN SUSPECTED THE EXISTENCE OF A FOURTH ROBOT."
YOU SEE, I FIRMLY BELIEVED THE ONLY THING THAT COULD DEFEAT SUCH A MIRACULOUS ROBOT WOULD BE ANOTHER SUCH ROBOT--WHICH I PROVED BY DESTROYING YOURS...
...AND THEREBY ELIMINATING YOUR POTENTIAL THREAT.
BUT WHAT DO YOU WANT? TO CONQUER THE WORLD? WHAT?!
NO... NOTHING SO AMBITIOUS. AT THE MOMENT I AM MERELY DRUNK WITH THE POWER OF THE THING, THE SHEER AWESOME SIZE AND STRENGTH OF IT--THE GLORY OF DOING WHATEVER I PLEASE--AND CRUSHING ANYONE AND ANYTHING THAT TRIES TO STOP ME.

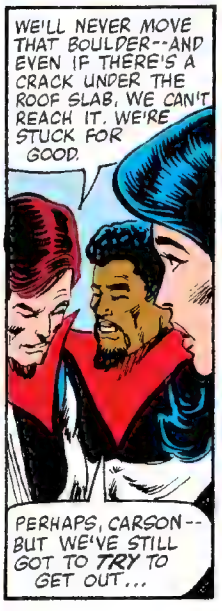

BUT SINCE THE NOVELTY WILL EVENTUALLY WEAR OFF, I'M CERTAIN, I'VE DECIDED TO SIMPLY HAVE FUN WHILE BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE... AS YOU CAN SEE BY ALL THAT GLITTERING GOLD WHICH IS NOW MINE.
NO, WORLD CONQUEST IS TOO GRANDIOSE AND COMPLICATED FOR ME. I AM MAINLY INTERESTED IN THE SIMPLE THINGS -- THE THRILL OF ULTIMATE POWER FOR NOW AND, OF COURSE, AMPLE WEALTH FOR MY EVENTUAL RETIREMENT.

THERE IT IS-- GET READY!

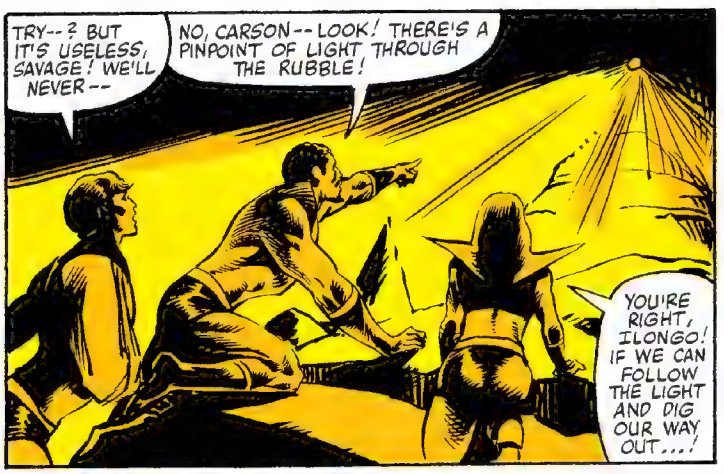

WHAT-- ? HELICOPTERS--!
THEN IT SEEMS YOUR FRIENDS THE FANTASTIC FOUR ARE NOT COMPLETELY DEFEATED, AFTER ALL.


A SITUATION I MUST RECTIFY.

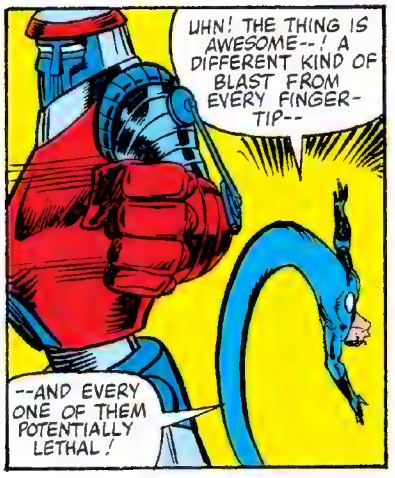

IN THE MEANTIME, YOU WILL REMAIN HERE FOR SAFE-KEEPING.


WE'LL NEVER MOVE THAT BOULDER--AND EVEN IF THERE'S A CRACK UNDER THE ROOF SLAB, WE CAN'T REACH IT. WE'RE STUCK FOR GOOD.
PERHAPS, CARSON-- BUT WE'VE STILL GOT TO TRY TO GET OUT...

"...BECAUSE THE F.F. MAY NEED US."
WE'RE DRAWING ITS FIRE IMMEDIATELY-- GET AWAY FROM THE HELICOPTER BEFORE ANY INNOCENTS ARE HURT.
YEAH, AWAY FROM THE CHOPPER, STRETCH--
--AND RIGHT DOWN THAT BIG BOZO'S THROAT!

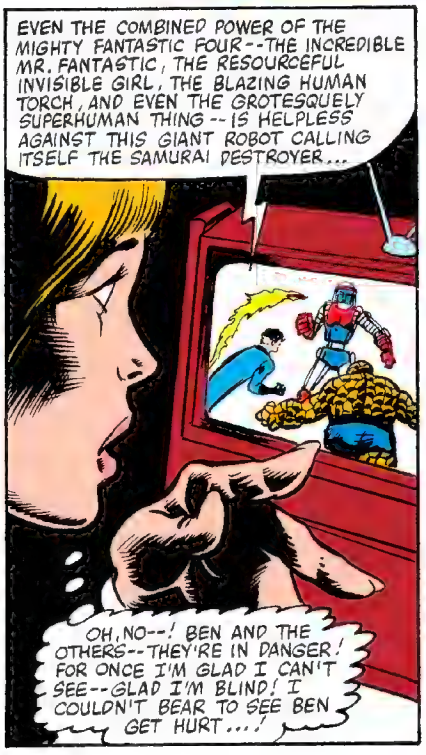

TRY--? BUT IT'S USELESS, SAVAGE! WE'LL NEVER--
NO, CARSON--LOOK! THERE'S A PINPOINT OF LIGHT THROUGH THE RUBBLE!
YOU'RE RIGHT, ILONGO! IF WE CAN FOLLOW THE LIGHT AND DIG OUR WAY OUT...!

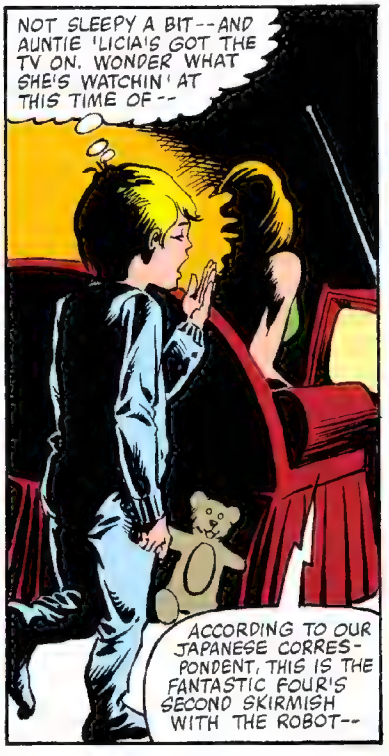
I KNOW IT'S TIME FOR BED, AUNTIE 'LICIA, BUT YOU STILL DIDN'T TELL ME WHY DADDY WON'T LISTEN TO ME WHEN I TELL HIM NEAT STUFF.
I'M SURE HE DOES, FRANKLIN.
NOPE, HE DIDN'T LISTEN.


UHN! THE THING IS AWESOME--! A DIFFERENT KIND OF BLAST FROM EVERY FINGER-TIP--
--AND EVERY ONE OF THEM POTENTIALLY LETHAL!

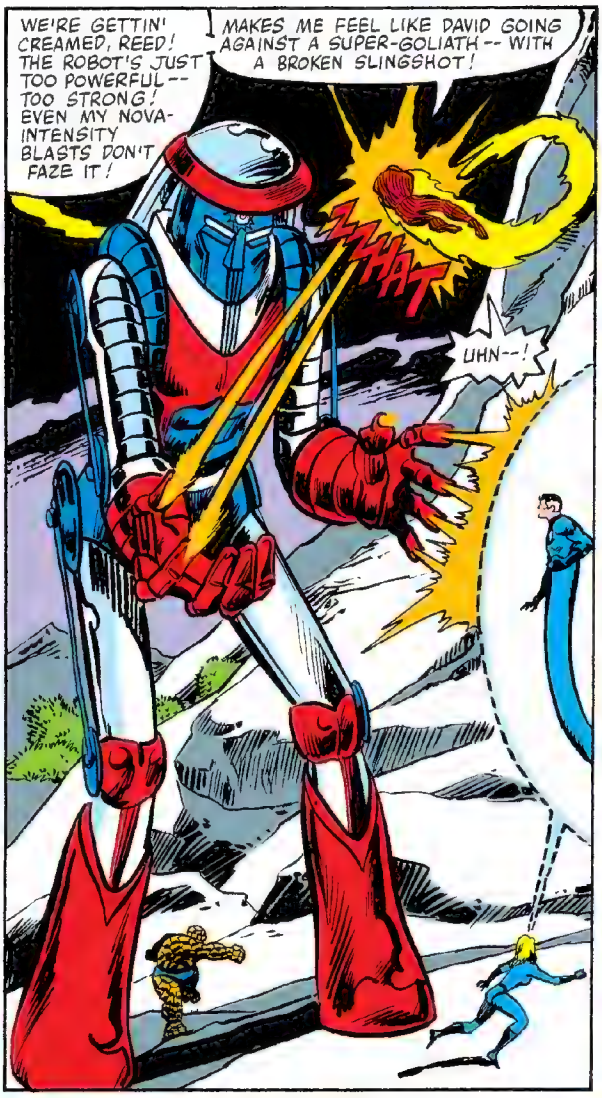
WE CAN'T GIVE UP. IT'S AS IF THE FOLLOWERS WERE GIVING US A SIGN FROM BEYOND...
YEAH, THEY FOLLOWED THE LIGHT ALL THEIR LIVES--AND NOW WE'VE GOT TO FOLLOW THEIR EXAMPLE...

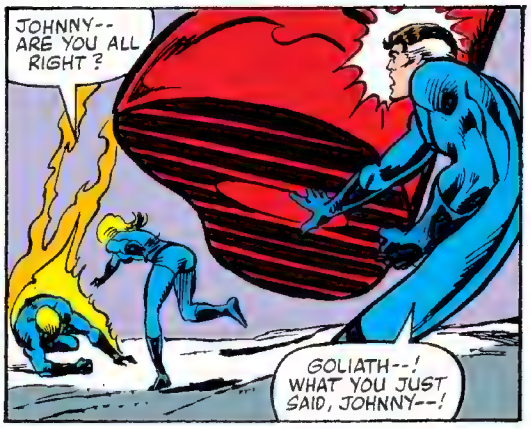
NOW THAT FRANKLIN'S ALL TUCKED IN, I MIGHT AS WELL LISTEN TO THE TV FOR A--
--LIVE VIA-SATELLITE-RELAY FROM JAPAN...

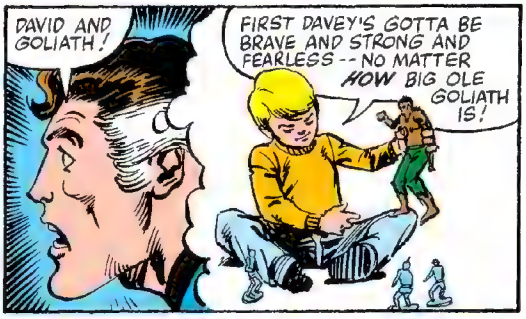

EVEN THE COMBINED POWER OF THE MIGHTY FANTASTIC FOUR--THE INCREDIBLE MR. FANTASTIC, THE RESOURCEFUL INVISIBLE GIRL, THE BLAZING HUMAN TORCH, AND EVEN THE GROTESQUELY SUPERHUMAN THING--IS HELPLESS AGAINST THIS GIANT ROBOT CALLING ITSELF THE SAMURAI DESTROYER...
OH, NO--! BEN AND THE OTHERS--THEY'RE IN DANGER! FOR ONCE I'M GLAD I CAN'T SEE--GLAD I'M BLIND! I COULDN'T BEAR TO SEE BEN GET HURT...!

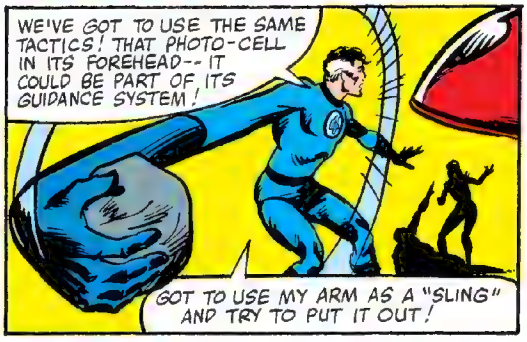

NOT SLEEPY A BIT--AND AUNTIE 'LICIA'S GOT THE TV ON. WONDER WHAT SHE'S WATCHIN' AT THIS TIME OF--
ACCORDING TO OUR JAPANESE CORRESPONDENT, THIS IS THE FANTASTIC FOUR'S SECOND SKIRMISH WITH THE ROBOT--

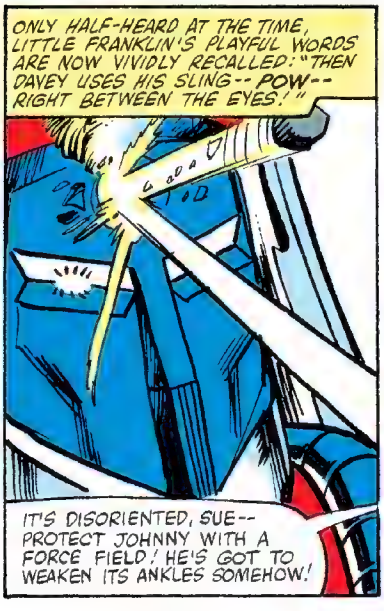
--AND FROM THE LOOKS OF THE BATTLE, IT COULD WELL BE THE VALIANT GROUP'S LAST STAND.
EYES INSTANTLY AWAKE AND, LOCKED ON THE SCREEN'S LIVID VIEW OF HIS PARENTS AND UNCLES, FRANKLIN RICHARDS FREEZES IN SILENT HORROR.

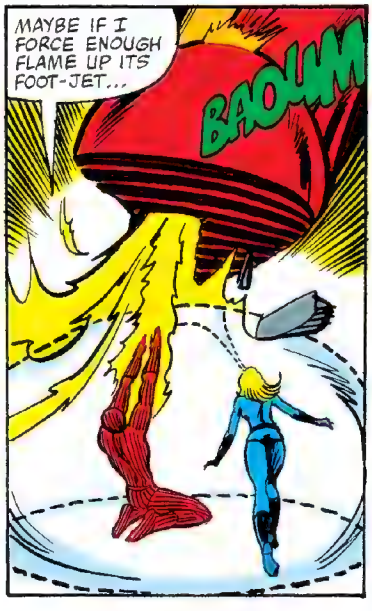

WE'RE GETTIN' CREAMED, REED! THE ROBOT'S JUST TOO POWERFUL--TOO STRONG! EVEN MY NOVA-INTENSITY BLASTS DON'T FAZE IT!
MAKES ME FEEL LIKE DAVID GOING AGAINST A SUPER-GOLIATH--WITH A BROKEN SLINGSHOT!
ZZHAT
UHN--!


JOHNNY--ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
GOLIATH--! WHAT YOU JUST SAID, JOHNNY--!

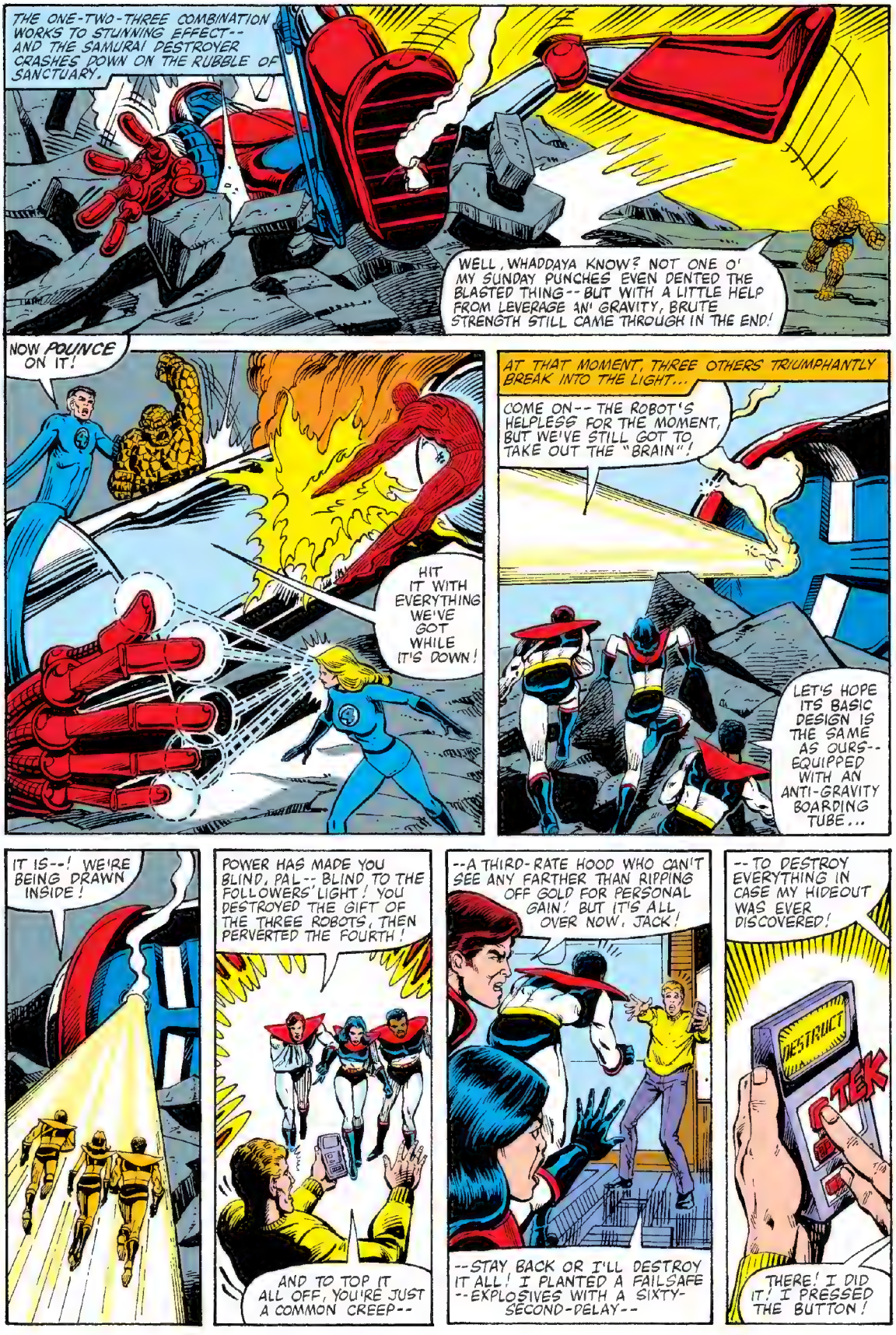

DAVID AND GOLIATH!
FIRST DAVEY'S GOTTA BE BRAVE AND STRONG AND FEARLESS--NO MATTER HOW BIG OLE GOLIATH IS!


WE'VE GOT TO USE THE SAME TACTICS! THAT PHOTO-CELL IN ITS FOREHEAD--IT COULD BE PART OF ITS GUIDANCE SYSTEM!
GOT TO USE MY ARM AS A "SLING" AND TRY TO PUT IT OUT!


ONLY HALF-HEARD AT THE TIME, LITTLE FRANKLIN'S PLAYFUL WORDS ARE NOW VIVIDLY RECALLED: "THEN DAVEY USES HIS SLING--POW--RIGHT BETWEEN THE EYES!"
IT'S DISORIENTED, SUE--PROTECT JOHNNY WITH A FORCE FIELD! HE'S GOT TO WEAKEN ITS ANKLES SOMEHOW!

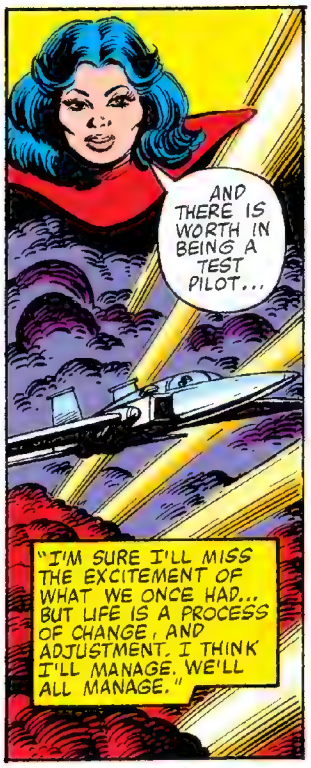

MAYBE IF I FORCE ENOUGH FLAME UP ITS FOOT-JET...
BAOUM

IT WORKED! NOW, BEN, IT'S UP TO YOU! TRY TO TRIP IT UP!
MAYBE IF I REACH BACK TO MY COLLEGE FOOTBALL DAYS--
WHAM
--AND COME UP WITH A LITTLE GRIDIRON GLORY...


THE ONE-TWO-THREE COMBINATION WORKS TO STUNNING EFFECT-- AND THE SAMURAI DESTROYER CRASHES DOWN ON THE RUBBLE OF SANCTUARY.
WELL, WHADDAYA KNOW? NOT ONE O' MY SUNDAY PUNCHES EVEN DENTED THE BLASTED THING-- BUT WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM LEVERAGE AN' GRAVITY, BRUTE STRENGTH STILL CAME THROUGH IN THE END!
NOW POUNCE ON IT!
HIT IT WITH EVERYTHING WE'VE GOT WHILE IT'S DOWN!
AT THAT MOMENT, THREE OTHERS TRIUMPHANTLY BREAK INTO THE LIGHT...
COME ON-- THE ROBOT'S HELPLESS FOR THE MOMENT, BUT WE'VE STILL GOT TO TAKE OUT THE "BRAIN"!
LET'S HOPE ITS BASIC DESIGN IS THE SAME AS OURS-- EQUIPPED WITH AN ANTI-GRAVITY BOARDING TUBE...
IT IS--! WE'RE BEING DRAWN INSIDE!
POWER HAS MADE YOU BLIND, PAL-- BLIND TO THE FOLLOWERS' LIGHT! YOU DESTROYED THE GIFT OF THE THREE ROBOTS, THEN PERVERTED THE FOURTH!
AND TO TOP IT ALL OFF, YOU'RE JUST A COMMON CREEP--
--A THIRD-RATE HOOD WHO CAN'T SEE ANY FARTHER THAN RIPPING OFF GOLD FOR PERSONAL GAIN! BUT IT'S ALL OVER NOW, JACK!
--STAY BACK OR I'LL DESTROY IT ALL! I PLANTED A FAILSAFE --EXPLOSIVES WITH A SIXTY-SECOND-DELAY--
--TO DESTROY EVERYTHING IN CASE MY HIDEOUT WAS EVER DISCOVERED!
DESTRUCT
TEK
THERE! I DID IT! I PRESSED THE BUTTON!

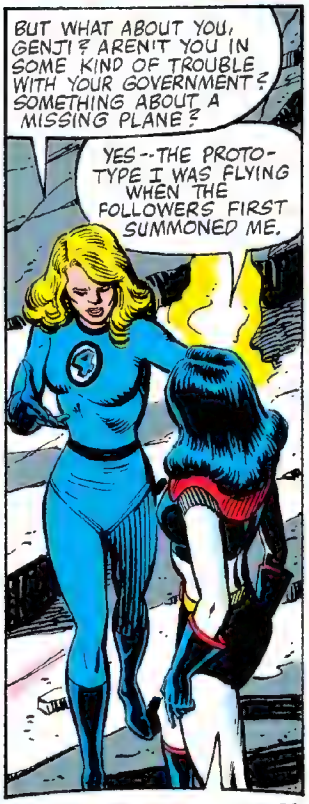
NOO!!
TOO LATE -- THE IDIOT ACTUALLY DID IT! CALL THE F.F., GENJI -- THEY'VE GOTTA GET US OUT OF HERE WITHIN SIXTY SECONDS!
KRAK
UHN--!
HURRY, TORCH -- LESS THAN HALF A MINUTE BEFORE THE EXPLOSION!
MR. FANTASTIC -- YOU'VE GOTTA GET SAVAGE -- AND THE PUNK WHO CAUSED THIS WHOLE MESS!
GOT THEM! ERECT A FORCEFIELD, SUE -- A HUGE DOME TO CONTAIN US ALL -- AND CONCENTRATE AS YOU'VE NEVER DONE BEFORE, DARLING!
IF THE MAGNITUDE OF THE EXPLOSION IS CONSISTENT WITH THE REST OF THE ROBOT'S TECHNOLOGY--
"--YOU'LL HAVE TO PROTECT US FROM A NEAR NUCLEAR BLAST!"
IT IS.
BUT SHE DOES.
NOW EVEN THE UNDERGROUND LEVEL OF SANCTUARY HAS BEEN DESTROYED...
AND THE SAMURAI DESTROYER... BLASTED BEYOND RECOGNITION... JUST LIKE OUR ROBOTS...
YEAH... SOMETHIN' TELLS ME IT'S OVER... ALL OVER...

AT THE BAXTER BUILDING, THE FREEZE OF SILENT SHOCK SNAPS...
HOORAY! DADDY DID IT! HE WAS LISTENIN' TO ME!
FRANKLIN! WHAT ARE YOU DOING UP?! YOU WERE WATCHING THE WHOLE TIME--?!
BUT YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE--
BUT IT'S OKAY NOW, AUNTIE 'LICIA--CUZ THEY DID IT! DADDY WAS LISTENIN' AN' HE DID IT!
JUST LIKE DAVEY DID TO OLE GOLIATH!
EPILOGUE:
"AND THE BIG BULLY LOSES IN THE END," QUOTH FRANKLIN. REMIND ME TO BUY HIM AN ICE CREAM WHEN WE GET HOME.
SOMETIMES, DARLING, ONLY A CHILD CAN SEE THE MOST DIRECT SOLUTION...
AND SO THE LAST WARRIOR HAS FALLEN... BUT MAYBE IT'S BETTER THIS WAY. MAYBE THE WARRIORS JUST DIDN'T BELONG IN THIS WORLD...
IF ANY OF THEM HAD EVER FALLEN INTO THE HANDS OF OTHER CREEPS LIKE THAT GUY...
YES, PERHAPS YOU'RE RIGHT, MR. CARSON. BUT WHAT WILL YOU DO NOW?
THE ONLY THING WE CAN DO--RETURN TO OUR NORMAL LIVES.
SAVAGE HAS STILL GOT HIS MARINE LAB...
INDEED. JUDITH AND I HAVE BEEN PLANNING A RESEARCH EXPEDITION TO THE GALAPAGOS...
"I'LL HAVE PLENTY TO KEEP ME BUSY."
AND I'LL GO BACK TO STUNTING FOR THE MOVIES WITH DEENA...
"IT'S A LIVING."


AND THERE IS WORTH IN BEING A TEST PILOT...
"I'M SURE I'LL MISS THE EXCITEMENT OF WHAT WE ONCE HAD... BUT LIFE IS A PROCESS OF CHANGE, AND ADJUSTMENT. I THINK I'LL MANAGE. WE'LL ALL MANAGE."

GENJI'S RIGHT. BESIDES, WHO SAYS YOU CAN'T BE HEROIC ON YOUR OWN -- WITHOUT A GIANT ROBOT? HEROISM IS A RELATIVE THING -- AND IT CAN BE DONE IN LITTLE WAYS ON A SMALL SCALE... A HUMAN SCALE.
AND EVEN IF WE NEVER GET A CHANCE TO PROVE OUR HEROISM AGAIN... WELL, WHAT'S SO BAD ABOUT BEING NORMAL?

THE LAST WORDS ARE SOFT... AND ALMOST CHOKED...
STUNTMAN, TEST PILOT, MARINE BIOLOGIST -- THERE'S SOMETHING TO BE SAID FOR THOSE OCCUPATIONS... ISN'T THERE?
YES, MR. CARSON, THERE IS...
THERE CERTAINLY IS.


BUT WHAT ABOUT YOU, GENJI? AREN'T YOU IN SOME KIND OF TROUBLE WITH YOUR GOVERNMENT? SOMETHING ABOUT A MISSING PLANE?
YES -- THE PROTOTYPE I WAS FLYING WHEN THE FOLLOWERS FIRST SUMMONED ME.

BUT NOW THAT OUR... CAREERS ... AS AGENTS OF THE LIGHT HAVE COME TO AN END, THERE'S NO REASON WHY I CANNOT SIMPLY REVEAL THE TRUTH NOW. THERE IS NO LONGER ANY SECRET TO PROTECT.

THE HEARING WILL BE DIFFICULT, BUT IF THEY CAN BE MADE TO BELIEVE ME... MY NAME WILL BE CLEARED.
WE'D BE GLAD TO TESTIFY IN YOUR BEHALF, GENJI -- VOUCH FOR THE TRUTH OF YOUR STATEMENTS.

YEAH, ONCE THEY GET ME ON THE WITNESS STAND AN' GLOM MY BABY BLUES, THEY WON'T DARE QUESTION YER STORY.

NO FURTHER WORDS, THEN. JUST A LAST SILENT WALK, AWAY FROM... EVERYTHING.
IT'S A BIG LOSS FOR THEM, BUT THEY'RE STILL VERY YOUNG. THEY'LL GET OVER IT. IN TIME, THEY MAY EVEN PREFER THE RETURN TO NORMAL.
YEAH... KINDA MAKES ME WONDER... WHAT IT'D BE LIKE TA BE IN THEIR SHOES RIGHT NOW...

BEIN' A FREAK LIKE THE THING AIN'T SO BAD NO MORE -- I'VE GOTTEN USED TO IT -- PROB'LY EVEN MISS IT IF IT WUZ TAKEN AWAY FROM ME...

NEXT: THE FF GO ON VACATION, ONLY TO CONFRONT THE CHILLING MENACE OF --

THE BRAIN PARASITES!

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THE WORLD'S GREATEST COMIC MAGAZINE!
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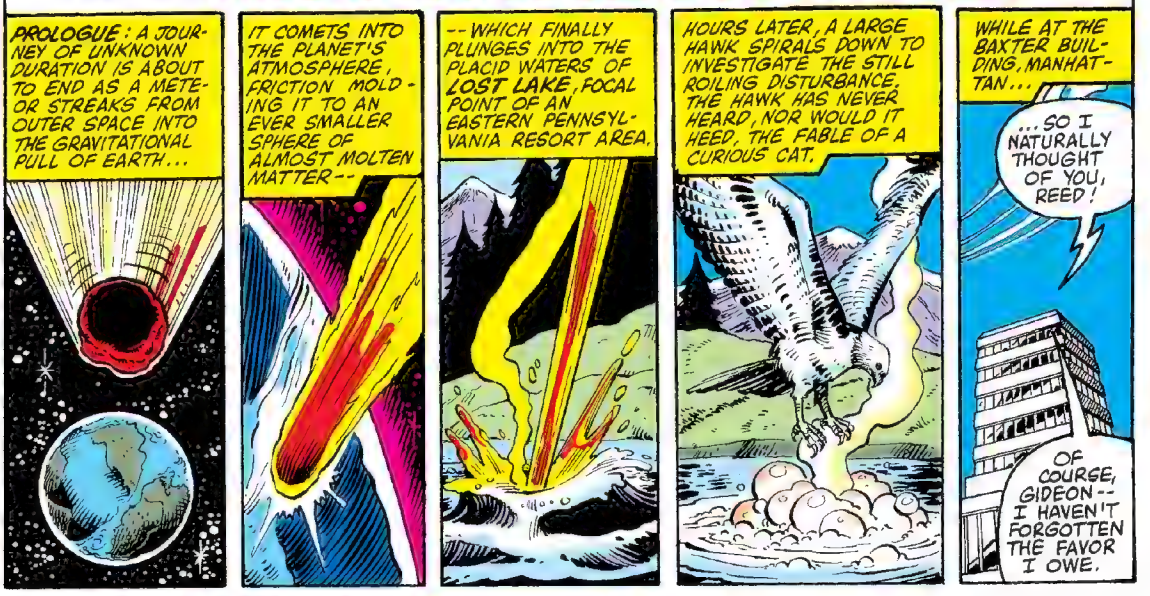
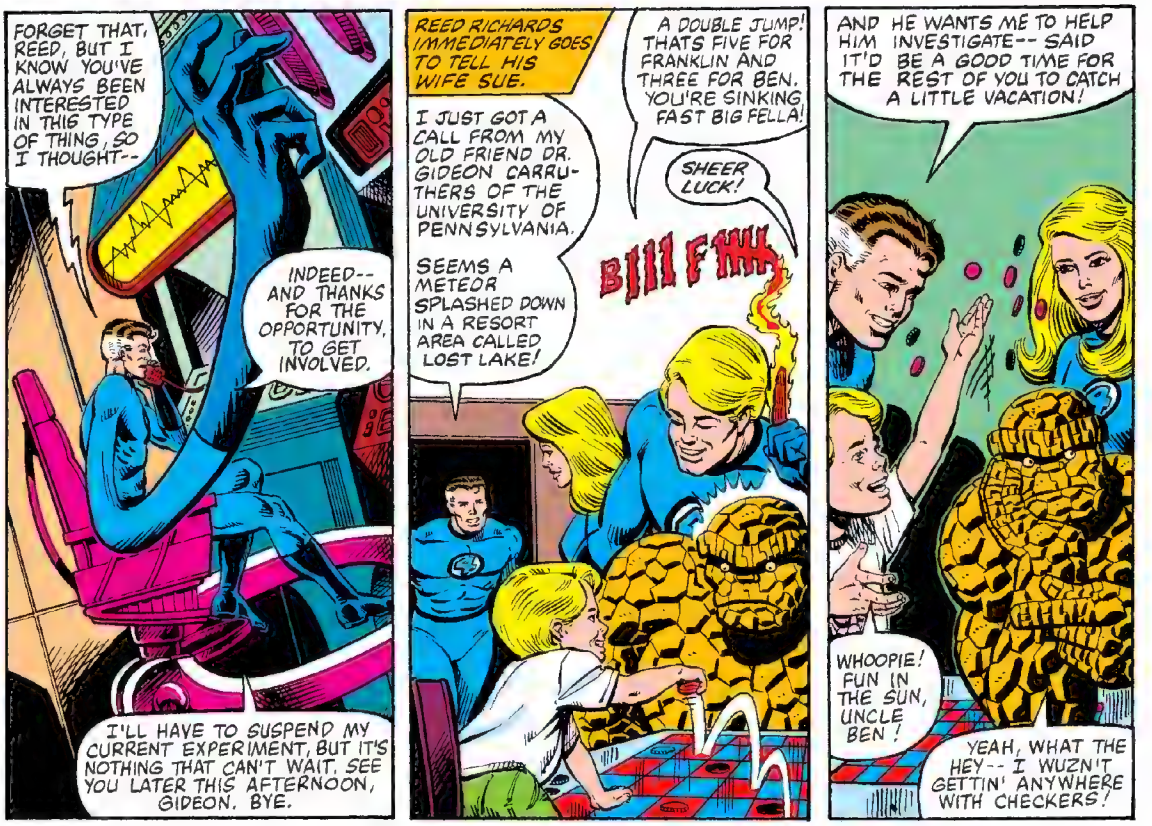
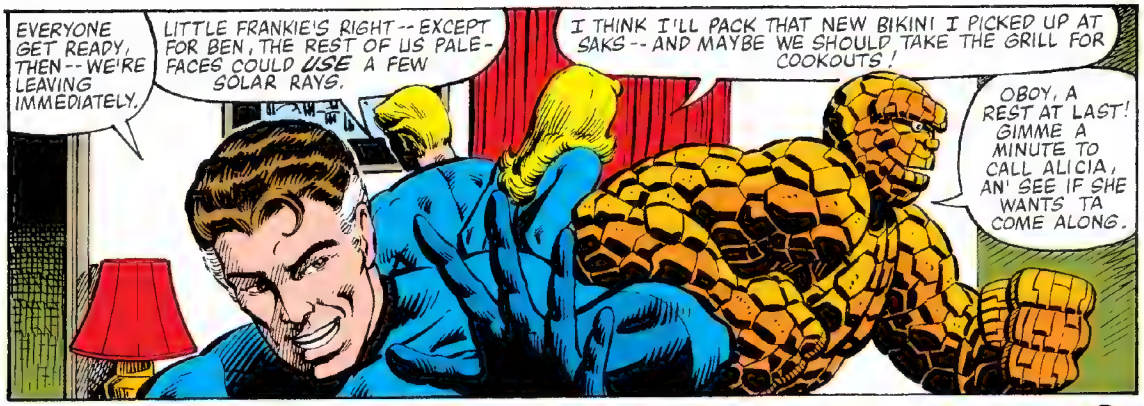
THE BRAIN PARASITES!

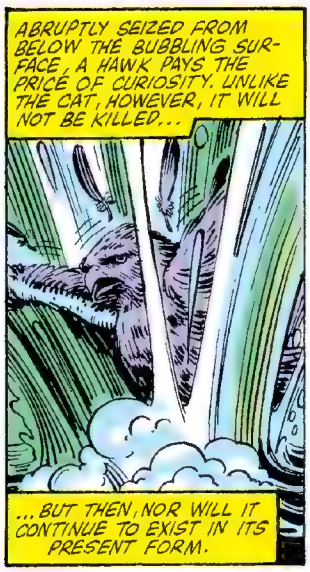
Reed Richards! Ben Grimm! Sue Richards! Johnny Storm! Together they braved the unknown terrors of outer space and were changed into something more than human! MR. FANTASTIC! THE THING! THE INVISIBLE GIRL! THE HUMAN TORCH! And now the world will never again be the same!

Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE FANTASTIC FOUR!®

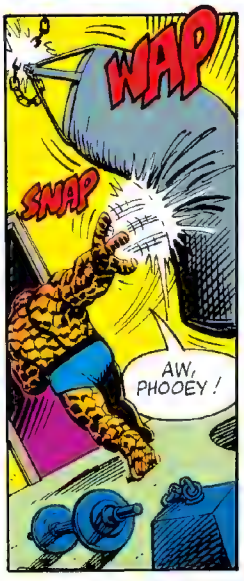

PROLOGUE: A JOURNEY OF UNKNOWN DURATION IS ABOUT TO END AS A METEOR STREAKS FROM OUTER SPACE INTO THE GRAVITATIONAL PULL OF EARTH...
IT COMETS INTO THE PLANET'S ATMOSPHERE, FRICTION MOLDING IT TO AN EVER SMALLER SPHERE OF ALMOST MOLTEN MATTER--
--WHICH FINALLY PLUNGES INTO THE PLACID WATERS OF LOST LAKE, FOCAL POINT OF AN EASTERN PENNSYLVANIA RESORT AREA.
HOURS LATER, A LARGE HAWK SPIRALS DOWN TO INVESTIGATE THE STILL ROILING DISTURBANCE. THE HAWK HAS NEVER HEARD, NOR WOULD IT HEED, THE FABLE OF A CURIOUS CAT.
WHILE AT THE BAXTER BUILDING, MANHATTAN...
...SO I NATURALLY THOUGHT OF YOU, REED!
OF COURSE, GIDEON-- I HAVEN'T FORGOTTEN THE FAVOR I OWE.


FORGET THAT, REED, BUT I KNOW YOU'VE ALWAYS BEEN INTERESTED IN THIS TYPE OF THING, SO I THOUGHT--
INDEED-- AND THANKS FOR THE OPPORTUNITY, TO GET INVOLVED.
I'LL HAVE TO SUSPEND MY CURRENT EXPERIMENT, BUT IT'S NOTHING THAT CAN'T WAIT. SEE YOU LATER THIS AFTERNOON, GIDEON. BYE.
REED RICHARDS IMMEDIATELY GOES TO TELL HIS WIFE SUE.
I JUST GOT A CALL FROM MY OLD FRIEND DR. GIDEON CARRUTHERS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA.
SEEMS A METEOR SPLASHED DOWN IN A RESORT AREA CALLED LOST LAKE!
A DOUBLE JUMP! THAT'S FIVE FOR FRANKLIN AND THREE FOR BEN. YOU'RE SINKING FAST BIG FELLA!
SHEER LUCK!
BIII F!!!!
AND HE WANTS ME TO HELP HIM INVESTIGATE-- SAID IT'D BE A GOOD TIME FOR THE REST OF YOU TO CATCH A LITTLE VACATION!
WHOOPIE! FUN IN THE SUN, UNCLE BEN!
YEAH, WHAT THE HEY-- I WUZN'T GETTIN' ANYWHERE WITH CHECKERS!

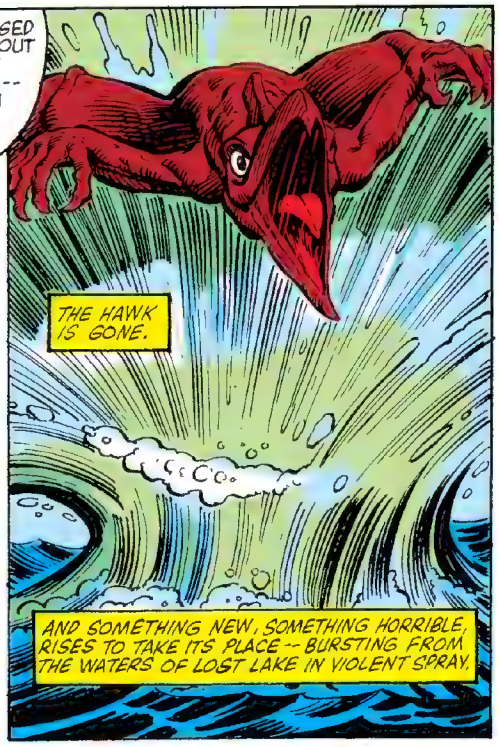

EVERYONE GET READY, THEN -- WE'RE LEAVING IMMEDIATELY.
LITTLE FRANKIE'S RIGHT -- EXCEPT FOR BEN, THE REST OF US PALE-FACES COULD USE A FEW SOLAR RAYS.
I THINK I'LL PACK THAT NEW BIKINI I PICKED UP AT SAKS -- AND MAYBE WE SHOULD TAKE THE GRILL FOR COOKOUTS!
OBOY, A REST AT LAST! GIMME A MINUTE TO CALL ALICIA, AN' SEE IF SHE WANTS TA COME ALONG.


ABRUPTLY SEIZED FROM BELOW THE BUBBLING SURFACE, A HAWK PAYS THE PRICE OF CURIOSITY. UNLIKE THE CAT, HOWEVER, IT WILL NOT BE KILLED...
...BUT THEN, NOR WILL IT CONTINUE TO EXIST IN ITS PRESENT FORM.

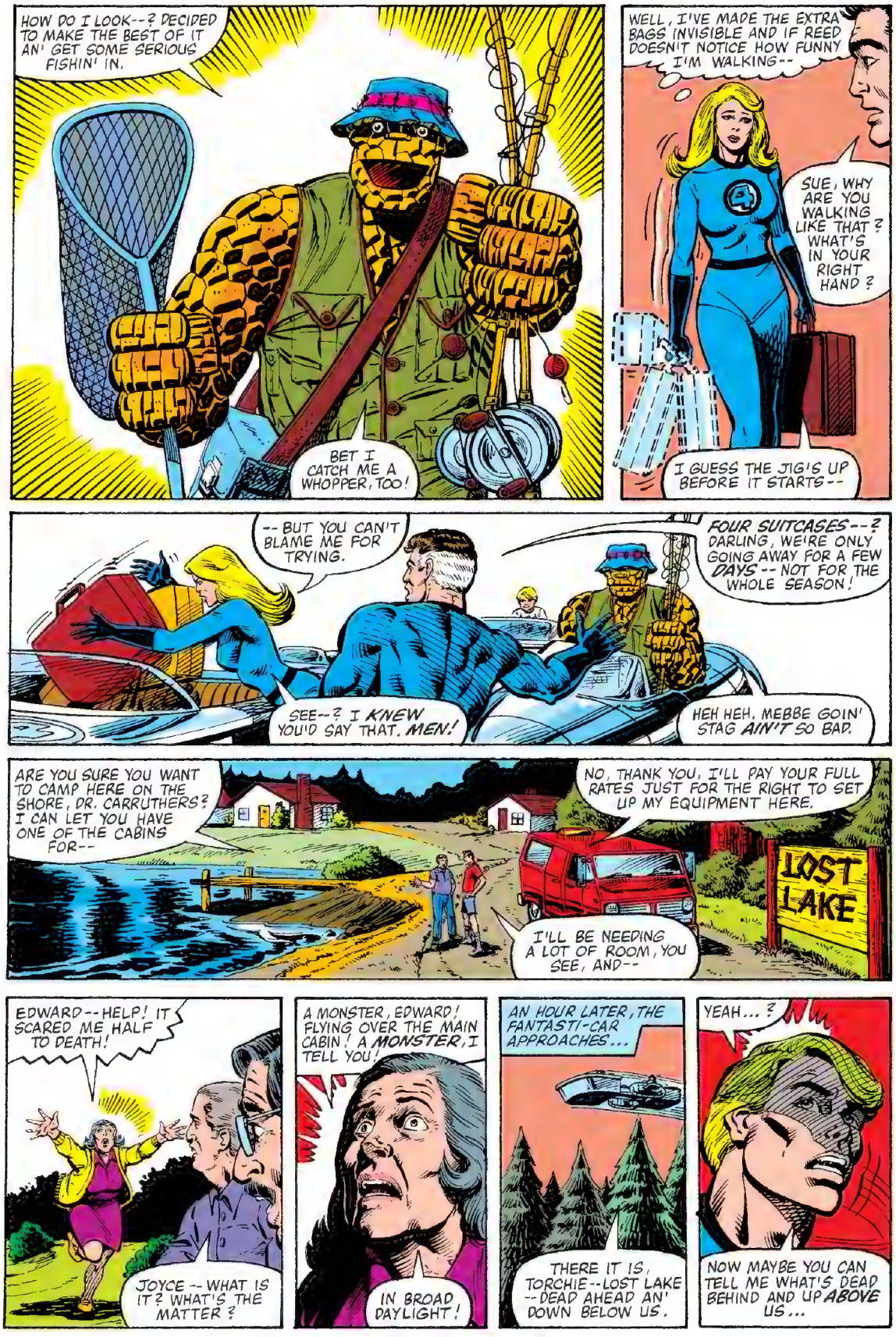
--KNOW IF YA'D LIKE TO COME ALONG, 'LICIA-BABE.
PLEASE UNDERSTAND IT'S ONLY BECAUSE I'M ANXIOUS TO FINISH MY NEW SCULPTURE -- AND YOU HAVE A GOOD TIME, BEN, OKAY?
WHY THANK YOU, BEN, BUT I DON'T THINK SO -- NOT THIS TIME.
YEAH, SURE, BABE. SEE YA.

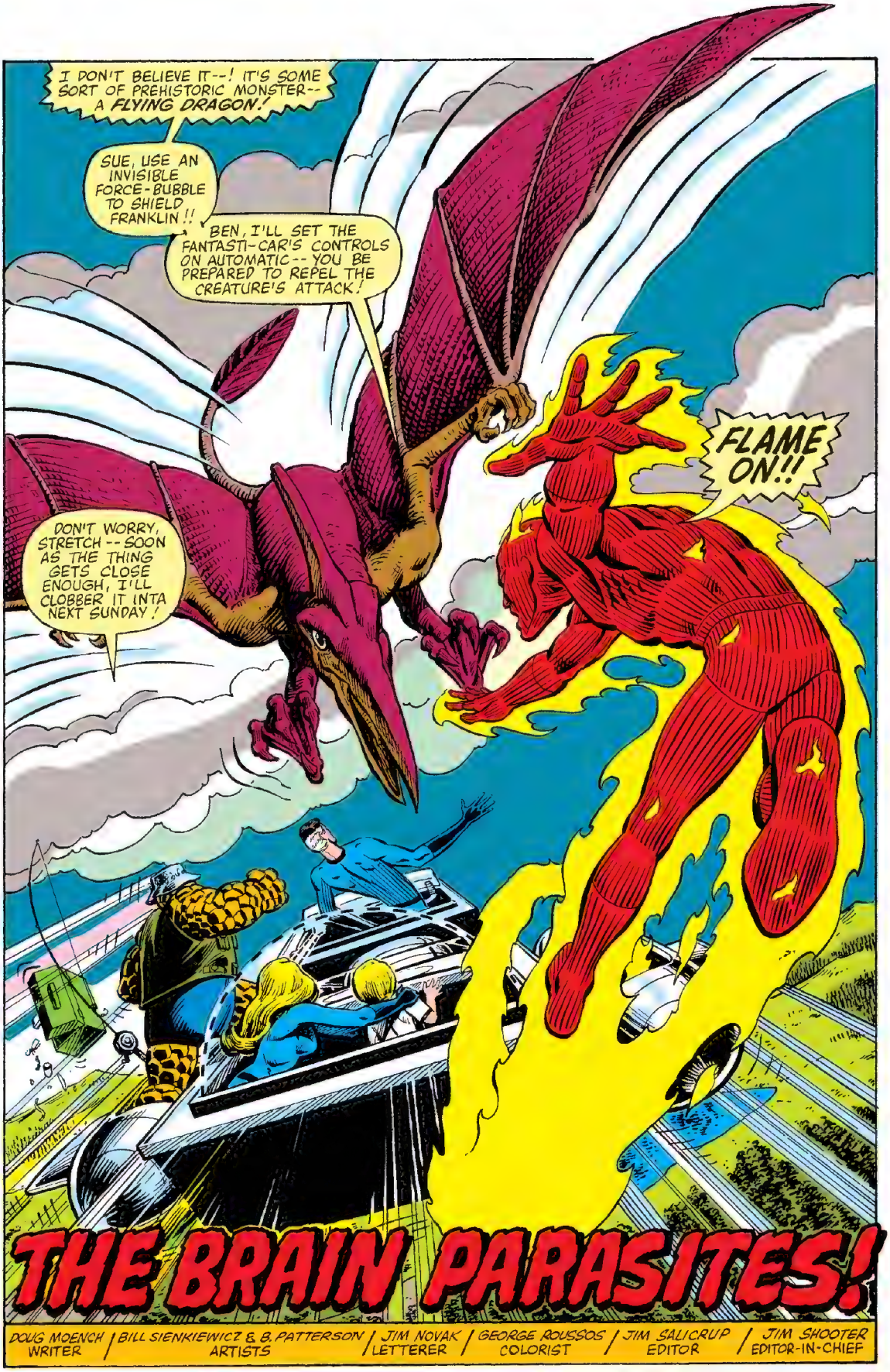

WAP
SNAP
AW, PHOOEY!

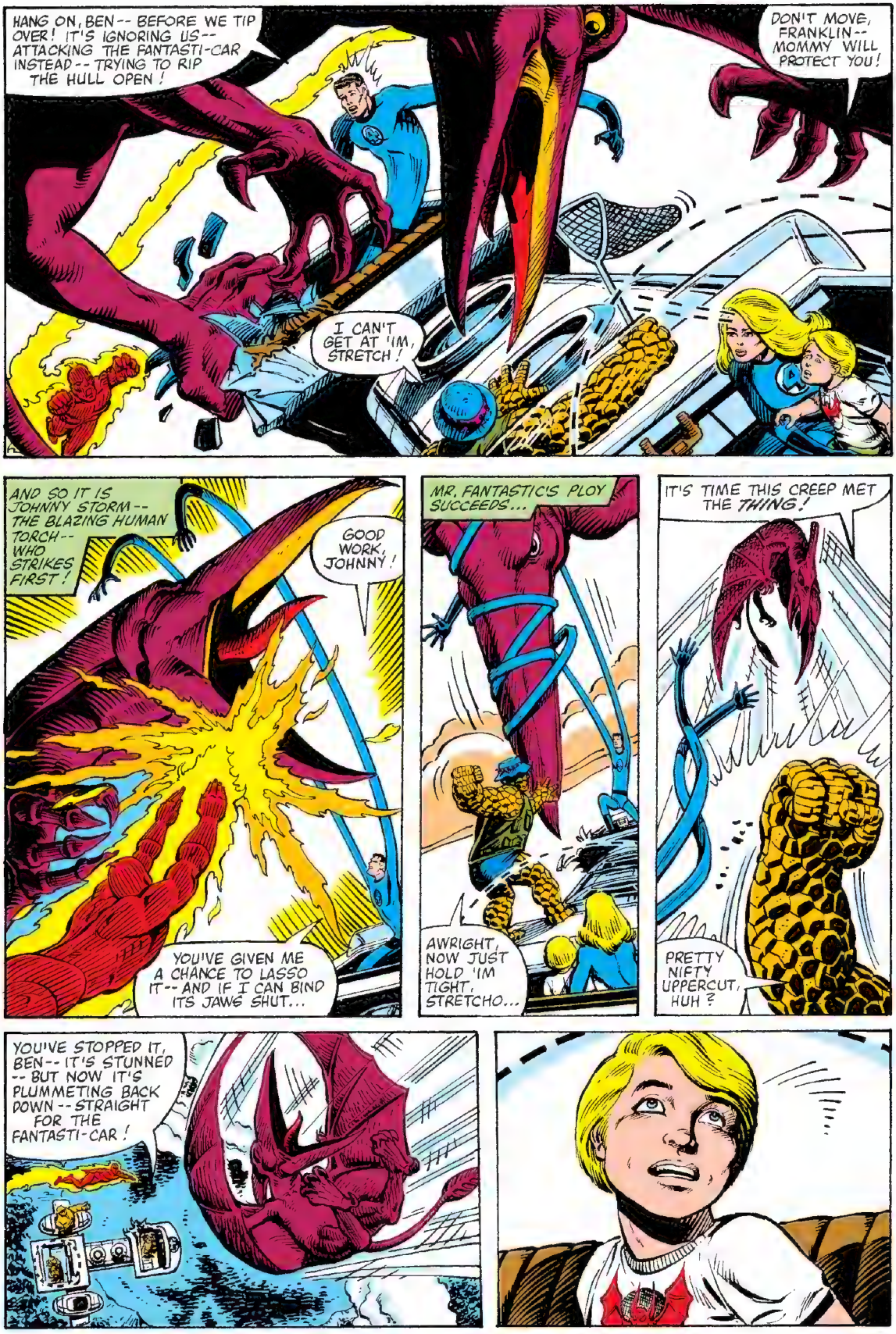
HOW'S A GUY S'POSED TA HAVE ANY FUN OUT IN THE BOONDOCKS WITHOUT HIS GIRL -- AN' WITH STRETCH BURYIN' HIS NOSE IN SOME OUTER SPACE ROCK -- ?
SHEESH! I JUST HOPE MY MUSCLES DON'T SHRIVEL UP AN' FALL OFF FROM LACK O' EXERCISE!

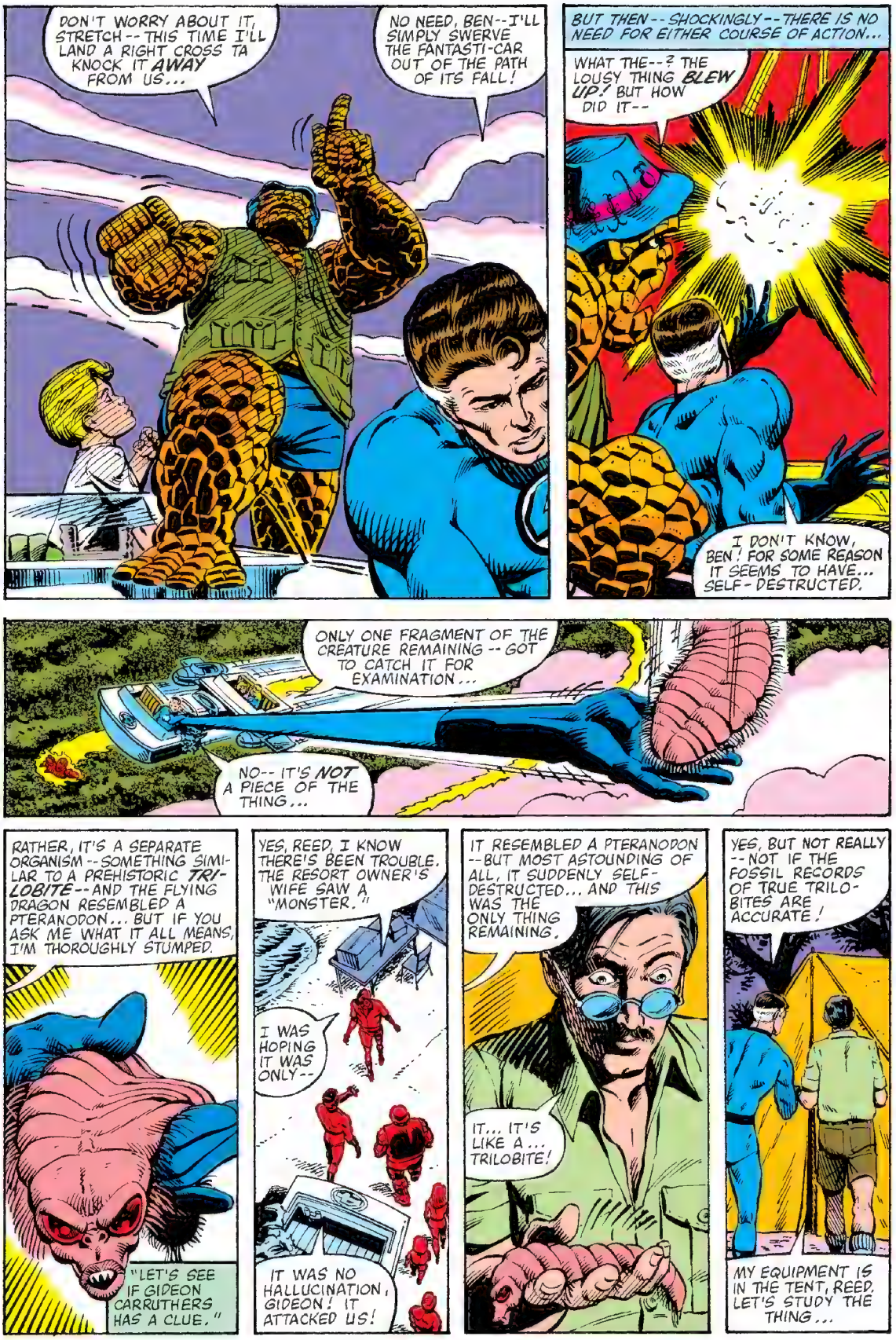

THE HAWK IS GONE.
AND SOMETHING NEW, SOMETHING HORRIBLE, RISES TO TAKE ITS PLACE -- BURSTING FROM THE WATERS OF LOST LAKE IN VIOLENT SPRAY.

I SEE YOU'VE GOT YOUR BEACH-FLOAT AND A DECENT STACK OF COMICS, FRANKIE, ALL PREPARED FOR THE BIG VACATION?
YOU BET, JOHNNY. I'M GONNA--
WELL--?
IT'S UNCLE BEN! GEE, HE SURE LOOKS PREPARED!


HOW DO I LOOK--? DECIDED TO MAKE THE BEST OF IT AN' GET SOME SERIOUS FISHIN' IN.
BET I CATCH ME A WHOPPER, TOO!
WELL, I'VE MADE THE EXTRA BAGS INVISIBLE AND IF REED DOESN'T NOTICE HOW FUNNY I'M WALKING--
SUE, WHY ARE YOU WALKING LIKE THAT? WHAT'S IN YOUR RIGHT HAND?
I GUESS THE JIG'S UP BEFORE IT STARTS--
-- BUT YOU CAN'T BLAME ME FOR TRYING.
FOUR SUITCASES--? DARLING, WE'RE ONLY GOING AWAY FOR A FEW DAYS -- NOT FOR THE WHOLE SEASON!
SEE--? I KNEW YOU'D SAY THAT, MEN!
HEH HEH. MEBBE GOIN' STAG AIN'T SO BAD.
ARE YOU SURE YOU WANT TO CAMP HERE ON THE SHORE, DR. CARRUTHERS? I CAN LET YOU HAVE ONE OF THE CABINS FOR--
NO, THANK YOU. I'LL PAY YOUR FULL RATES JUST FOR THE RIGHT TO SET UP MY EQUIPMENT HERE.
LOST LAKE
I'LL BE NEEDING A LOT OF ROOM, YOU SEE, AND--
EDWARD--HELP! IT SCARED ME HALF TO DEATH!
JOYCE -- WHAT IS IT? WHAT'S THE MATTER?
A MONSTER, EDWARD! FLYING OVER THE MAIN CABIN! A MONSTER, I TELL YOU!
IN BROAD DAYLIGHT!
AN HOUR LATER, THE FANTASTI-CAR APPROACHES...
THERE IT IS, TORCHIE--LOST LAKE --DEAD AHEAD AN' DOWN BELOW US.
YEAH...?
NOW MAYBE YOU CAN TELL ME WHAT'S DEAD BEHIND AND UP ABOVE US...

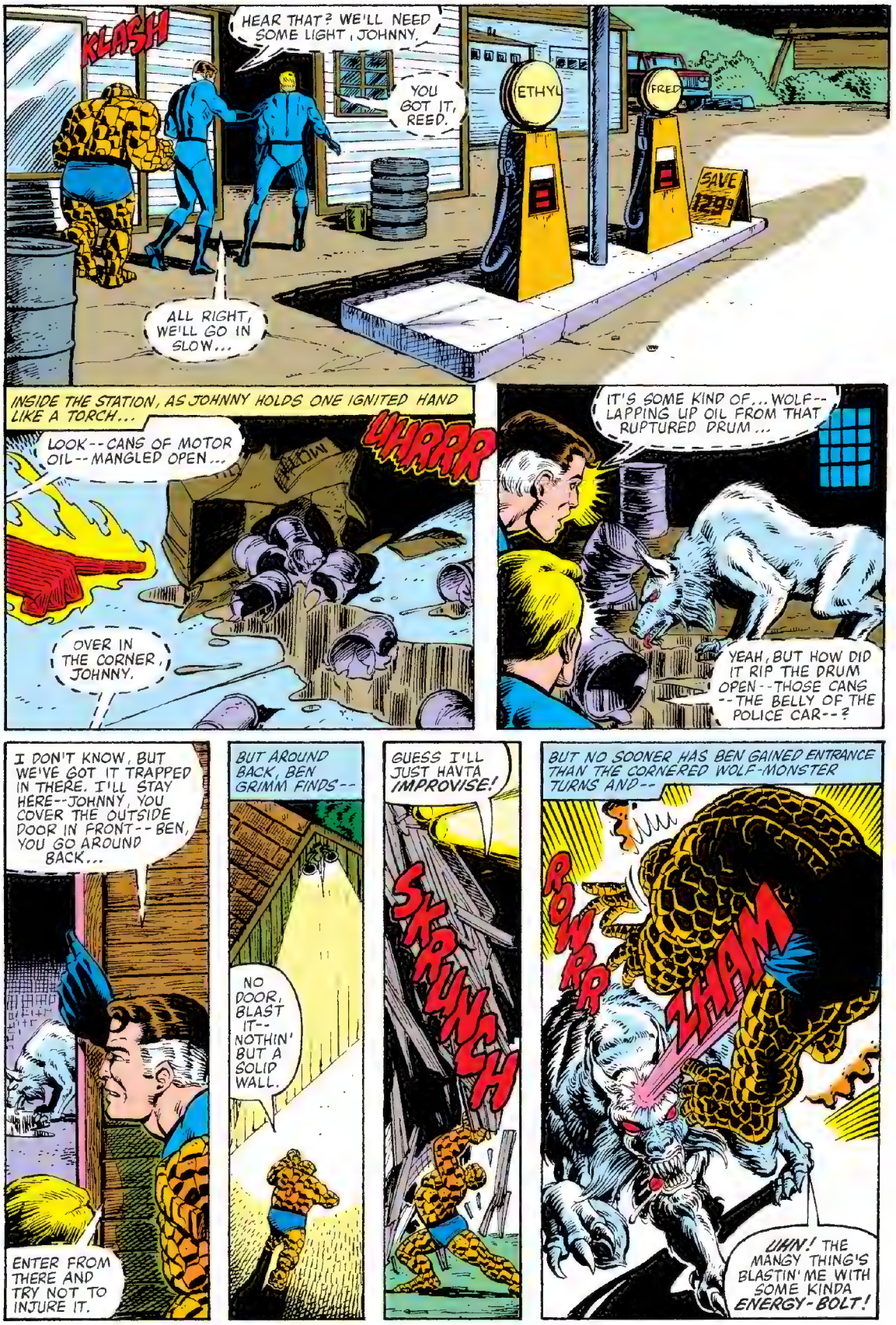

I DON'T BELIEVE IT--! IT'S SOME SORT OF PREHISTORIC MONSTER-- A FLYING DRAGON!
SUE, USE AN INVISIBLE FORCE-BUBBLE TO SHIELD FRANKLIN!!
BEN, I'LL SET THE FANTASTI-CAR'S CONTROLS ON AUTOMATIC -- YOU BE PREPARED TO REPEL THE CREATURE'S ATTACK!
FLAME ON!!
DON'T WORRY, STRETCH -- SOON AS THE THING GETS CLOSE ENOUGH, I'LL CLOBBER IT INTA NEXT SUNDAY!
THE BRAIN PARASITES!
DOUG MOENCH WRITER / BILL SIENKIEWICZ & B. PATTERSON ARTISTS / JIM NOVAK LETTERER / GEORGE ROUSSOS COLORIST / JIM SALICRUP EDITOR / JIM SHOOTER EDITOR-IN-CHIEF


HANG ON, BEN -- BEFORE WE TIP OVER! IT'S IGNORING US -- ATTACKING THE FANTASTI-CAR INSTEAD -- TRYING TO RIP THE HULL OPEN!
DON'T MOVE, FRANKLIN -- MOMMY WILL PROTECT YOU!
I CAN'T GET AT 'IM, STRETCH!
AND SO IT IS JOHNNY STORM -- THE BLAZING HUMAN TORCH -- WHO STRIKES FIRST!
GOOD WORK, JOHNNY!
YOU'VE GIVEN ME A CHANCE TO LASSO IT -- AND IF I CAN BIND ITS JAWS SHUT...
MR. FANTASTIC'S PLOY SUCCEEDS...
AWRIGHT, NOW JUST HOLD 'IM TIGHT, STRETCHO...
IT'S TIME THIS CREEP MET THE THING!
PRETTY NIFTY UPPERCUT, HUH?
YOU'VE STOPPED IT, BEN -- IT'S STUNNED -- BUT NOW IT'S PLUMMETING BACK DOWN -- STRAIGHT FOR THE FANTASTI-CAR!


DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT, STRETCH -- THIS TIME I'LL LAND A RIGHT CROSS TA KNOCK IT AWAY FROM US...
NO NEED, BEN--I'LL SIMPLY SWERVE THE FANTASTI-CAR OUT OF THE PATH OF ITS FALL!
BUT THEN -- SHOCKINGLY -- THERE IS NO NEED FOR EITHER COURSE OF ACTION...
WHAT THE--? THE LOUSY THING BLEW UP! BUT HOW DID IT--
I DON'T KNOW, BEN! FOR SOME REASON IT SEEMS TO HAVE... SELF-DESTRUCTED.
ONLY ONE FRAGMENT OF THE CREATURE REMAINING -- GOT TO CATCH IT FOR EXAMINATION...
NO-- IT'S NOT A PIECE OF THE THING...
RATHER, IT'S A SEPARATE ORGANISM -- SOMETHING SIMILAR TO A PREHISTORIC TRILOBITE -- AND THE FLYING DRAGON RESEMBLED A PTERANODON... BUT IF YOU ASK ME WHAT IT ALL MEANS, I'M THOROUGHLY STUMPED.
"LET'S SEE IF GIDEON CARRUTHERS HAS A CLUE."
YES, REED, I KNOW THERE'S BEEN TROUBLE. THE RESORT OWNER'S WIFE SAW A "MONSTER."
I WAS HOPING IT WAS ONLY--
IT WAS NO HALLUCINATION, GIDEON! IT ATTACKED US!
IT RESEMBLED A PTERANODON -- BUT MOST ASTOUNDING OF ALL, IT SUDDENLY SELF-DESTRUCTED... AND THIS WAS THE ONLY THING REMAINING.
IT... IT'S LIKE A... TRILOBITE!
YES, BUT NOT REALLY -- NOT IF THE FOSSIL RECORDS OF TRUE TRILOBITES ARE ACCURATE!
MY EQUIPMENT IS IN THE TENT, REED. LET'S STUDY THE THING...

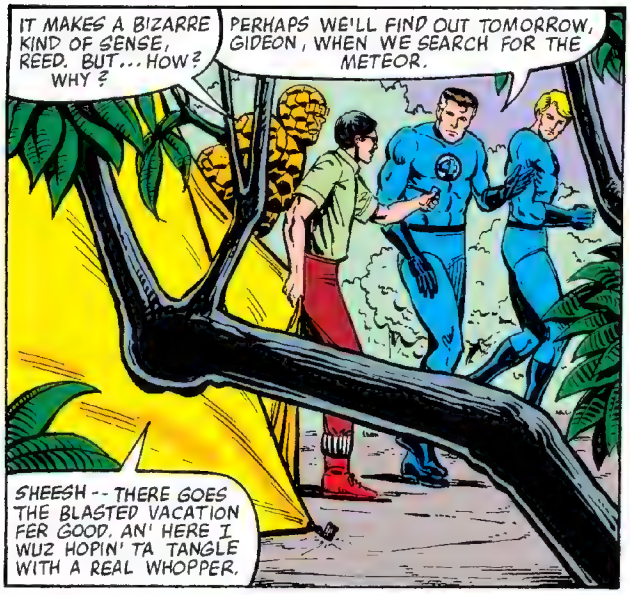
... WHICH LEAVES THE OTHERS TO HANDLE THE BAGGAGE.
LOOK -- IT'S THE THING! MAN, IS HE UGLY!
YEAH, AND THE BLOND GUY MUST BE JOHNNY STORM! HE'S CUTE!
I HOPE YOU'LL ENJOY YOUR CABIN -- IT'S AN HONOR TO HAVE SUCH CELEBRITIES STAYING WITH US.
HEY, IF THAT'S THE INVISIBLE GIRL, HOWCUM WE CAN SEE HER?
UH, I KNOW YOU'RE HERE TO STUDY THE METEOR THAT HIT THE LAKE, BUT...
... WELL, THERE'S MORE TO IT THAN JUST A METEOR. MY WIFE WAS HALF-SCARED TO DEATH AND... WELL, I JUST WOULDN'T WANT ANYONE STAYING AT MY RESORT TO COME TO ANY BAD --
YEAH, WE'VE HEARD THE STORY BEFORE, PAL. AND IF ANYONE CAN TAKE CARE O' BUSINESS, IT'S US!
SHEESH -- SOME VACATION!
I THINK YOU'D BETTER STAY INSIDE TONIGHT AND READ YOUR COMICBOOKS, FRANKLIN.
ARE YOU SURE YOU'RE OKAY, NOW? YOU SEEMED SO --
I'M OKAY, MOMMY. WE FOUGHT A DRAGON AND WON -- JUST LIKE IN THE COMICS.
NO, FRANKLIN, HONEY, NOT LIKE IN THE COMICS. THIS WAS REAL AND WE COULD HAVE BEEN HURT. YOU MUSTN'T CONFUSE REALITY WITH --
AW SHUCKS, MOMMY, I KNOW IT WAS REAL. ANYBODY WHO DOESN'T KNOW THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN REAL THINGS AND COMIC-BOOKS HAS TO BE GOOFY.
NIGHT:
AND IT WAS DEAD WHEN YOU CAUGHT IT, REED?
THAT'S RIGHT, GIDEON, AND I KNOW WHAT YOU'RE THINKING...
...IT WOULD HAVE BEEN AN INVALUABLE AID TO STUDY A LIVE SPECIMEN.
IF THERE ARE ANY OTHERS AROUND, WE'LL NEED ALL THE INFORMATION WE CAN --
WELL, I'VE GOT A POLICE SCANNER HERE AND I'VE ASKED EVERYONE TO REPORT ANYTHING ODD, NO MATTER HOW --
DR. CARRUTHERS --?

YES, I'M GIDEON CARRUTHERS. WHAT'S THE PROBLEM, SON?
IT'S MY DOG, SIR-- DUFF'S HIS NAME.
HE WAS ACTIN' REAL WEIRD ALL DAY AND NOW HE'S MISSIN'! WE'RE STAYIN' UP IN CABIN TWELVE AND MOM SAID TO COME DOWN AND TELL YOU.
DUFF'S JUST A MUTT, SIR, B-BUT HE'S A REAL GOOD DOG AND IF... IF HE--
WE'LL DO OUR BEST TO FIND HIM, SON. THANK YOUR MOTHER AND TELL HER SHE DID THE RIGHT THING IN REPORTING TO US.
WITH THE BOY GONE, REED AND GIDEON EXCHANGE A LOOK OF TROUBLED SIGNIFICANCE. BOTH ARE READY TO SPEAK... BUT THE MOMENT IS BROKEN...
...BY A CRACKLE OF STATIC FROM THE POLICE SCANNER.
--DISTURBANCE AT THE GAS STATION ON 202 A MILE SOUTH OF BEDMINSTER! IT... IT LOOKS LIKE SOME KIND OF--
NO! NOOO--
THE TRANSMISSION SPUTTERS, DIES...
...AND, INSTANTLY ALARMED, MR. FANTASTIC SPRINGS INTO DECISIVE ACTION.
GIDEON, IF YOU CAN STAY IN OUR CABIN WITH SUE AND FRANKLIN, I'LL TAKE BEN AND JOHNNY TO--
OF COURSE, REED--AND BE CAREFUL!
AND SO--
LOOKIT THAT CAR OVER THERE--FLIPPED OVER WITH THE BOTTOM BUSTED OPEN!
GAS
ETHYL
AGNES
IT MUST BE THE POLICE UNIT THAT SENT THE TRANSMISSION, BEN. WE'LL CHECK THAT FIRST.
B-BLASTED THE CAR, RIPPED IT OPEN... SOME KIND OF MONSTER... IN THE STATION... STILL IN THERE... YOU CAN HEAR IT SOMETIMES... MY ARM....!
SHERIFF
SIT TIGHT, TROOPER-- OTHER POLICE ARE ON THE WAY.
YEAH-- WE'LL CHECK OUT THE GAS STATION.

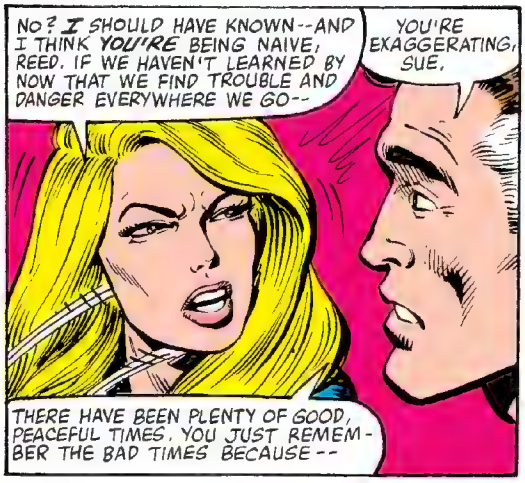

KLASH
HEAR THAT? WE'LL NEED SOME LIGHT, JOHNNY.
YOU GOT IT, REED.
ETHYL
FRED
SAVE 12¢
ALL RIGHT, WE'LL GO IN SLOW...
INSIDE THE STATION, AS JOHNNY HOLDS ONE IGNITED HAND LIKE A TORCH...
LOOK--CANS OF MOTOR OIL--MANGLED OPEN...
UHRRR
OVER IN THE CORNER, JOHNNY.
IT'S SOME KIND OF...WOLF--LAPPING UP OIL FROM THAT RUPTURED DRUM...
YEAH, BUT HOW DID IT RIP THE DRUM OPEN--THOSE CANS--THE BELLY OF THE POLICE CAR--?
I DON'T KNOW, BUT WE'VE GOT IT TRAPPED IN THERE. I'LL STAY HERE--JOHNNY, YOU COVER THE OUTSIDE DOOR IN FRONT--BEN, YOU GO AROUND BACK...
ENTER FROM THERE AND TRY NOT TO INJURE IT.
BUT AROUND BACK, BEN GRIMM FINDS--
NO DOOR, BLAST IT--NOTHIN' BUT A SOLID WALL.
GUESS I'LL JUST HAVTA IMPROVISE!
SKRUNCH
BUT NO SOONER HAS BEN GAINED ENTRANCE THAN THE CORNERED WOLF-MONSTER TURNS AND--
ROWRR
ZHAM
UHN! THE MANGY THING'S BLASTIN' ME WITH SOME KINDA ENERGY-BOLT!

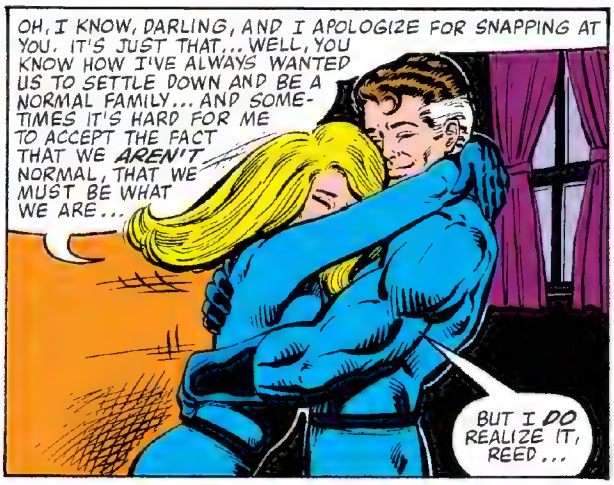
THEN, OUT FRONT--
WHAT THE--?! IT CRASHED RIGHT THROUGH THE WINDOW!
ZHAM
ETHYL
SOMETHING BLASTING FROM ITS HEAD-- KNOCKING OVER THE GAS PUMP!
HOLD YOUR FLAME, JOHNNY! IF YOU IGNITE THAT GAS THE WHOLE PLACE WILL--
I'M NOT THAT HOT-HEADED, REED!
I'VE GOT A HUNCH, BEN-- KEEP IT OCCUPIED WHILE I STRETCH AROUND IT AND TRY SOMETHING!
MAKE IT SNAPPY, STRETCH --I AIN'T IN NO MOOD TA GET ZAPPED AGAIN!
SOMETHING GLOWING ON THE BACK OF ITS NECK...
GOT IT!
THE WOLF-CREATURE IMMEDIATELY CRUMPLES, AS IF POLEAXED...
WHAT HAPPENED, STRETCH -- DIDJA KILL IT?
I HOPE JUST THE OPPOSITE, BEN-- INDEED, I HOPE I JUST PREVENTED IT FROM SELF-DESTRUCTING!
NOW LOOK AT IT--THE BLASTED THING'S CHANGIN' TO A REG'LAR DOG!
YES, THE SOLUTION TO THE MYSTERY OF THE MISSING MUTT...
...AS I SUSPECTED, BUT I CERTAINLY DIDN'T EXPECT SUCH A HAPPY ENDING.
WEEN?
I KNOW A LITTLE BOY WHO'S GOING TO BE MIGHTY HAPPY TO SEE YOU AGAIN, DUFF.

AND HERE'S THE ANSWER TO MY HUNCH --AN AFFIRMATIVE ONE. THIS IS WHAT CAUSED THE GLOW ON HIS NECK... AND IT'S STILL ALIVE.
YUCCH! LOOKIT THAT UGLY SUCKER-MOUTH! IT'S THE SAME THING THAT WUZ ON THE FLYIN' MONSTER--BUT WHAT IS IT?!
ANOTHER TRILOBITE-THING.
YES, A PARASITE--WHICH APPARENTLY MUTATES THE GENETIC STRUCTURE OF ITS HOST, REVERSING THE EVOLUTIONARY AGENT. THE PTERANODON MUST HAVE BEEN A HAWK OR A RAVEN, TRANSFORMED TO A REPTILIAN STAGE SINCE BIRDS ARE CLOSER TO DINOSAURS ON THE EVOLUTIONARY PATH.
AMBUL
THE DOG MERELY REGRESSED TO A VERSION OF ITS WOLF ANCESTORS--BUT RIGHT NOW, LET'S GET BACK QUICKLY...
"I WANT TO STUDY THE PARASITE WHILE IT'S STILL ALIVE."
DEAD--IN LESS THAN AN HOUR AFTER SEPARATION FROM ITS HOST.
WHAT DO YOU MAKE OF IT, REED? I'M ONLY A GEOLOGIST...
IT'S TRUE SYMBIOSIS, GIDEON. THE PARASITE REVERSES THE EVOLUTIONARY CHANGE OF THE HOST--
--AND CONFERS PSYCHIC POWER TO IT. IN RETURN, THE HOST USES THAT POWER TO PROCURE WHAT THE PARASITE NEEDS TO EXIST.
BUT THAT DOESN'T JIVE, REED. IF THE PARASITE JUST LEECHES BLOOD FROM THE HOST--
NOT BLOOD, JOHNNY--OIL.
OIL?! YA MEAN THAT THING EATS OIL LIKE FOOD--?!
WHY NOT? REMEMBER HOW THE PTERANODON ATTACKED THE FANTASTI-CAR? IT WAS TRYING TO GET AT THE ENGINE OIL. AND WE SAW THE WOLF LAPPING OIL IN THE GAS STATION...
IRONIC... OIL, CREATED IN PART BY THE DEATH OF THE DINOSAURS...
...AND THUS, THE VERY ESSENCE OF EVOLUTION'S TURNING POINT--FOSSIL FUEL. BUT THE PARASITE TAKES NOTHING FROM THE HOST INITIALLY, NOT BLOOD OR ANYTHING ELSE...
RATHER, IT MUST INJECT SOMETHING, INTO THE CORTEX AT THE BASE OF THE BRAIN, AFFECTING THE "REPTILIAN UNDERMIND"... AND THEREAFTER CONTROLS THE HOST IN QUEST OF ITS PETROLEUM NUTRIENT.

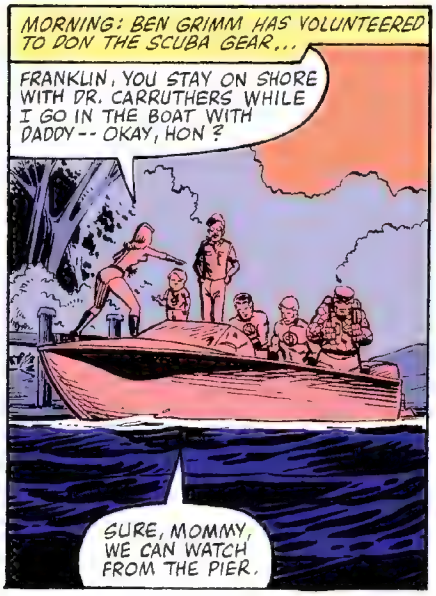

IT MAKES A BIZARRE KIND OF SENSE, REED. BUT... HOW? WHY?
PERHAPS WE'LL FIND OUT TOMORROW, GIDEON, WHEN WE SEARCH FOR THE METEOR.
SHEESH -- THERE GOES THE BLASTED VACATION FER GOOD. AN' HERE I WUZ HOPIN' TA TANGLE WITH A REAL WHOPPER.

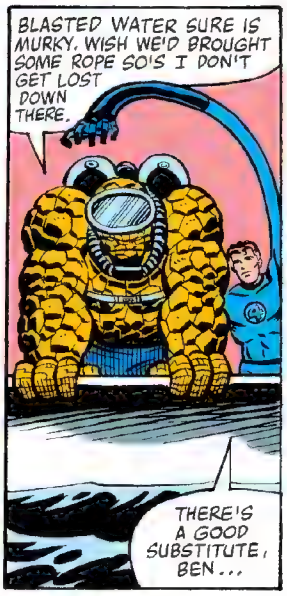
LATER, IN THE F.F.'S CABIN...
WHY DID WE HAVE TO BRING OUR SON --EXPOSE HIM TO SO MUCH DANGER?
WE COULDN'T HAVE KNOWN, DARLING...

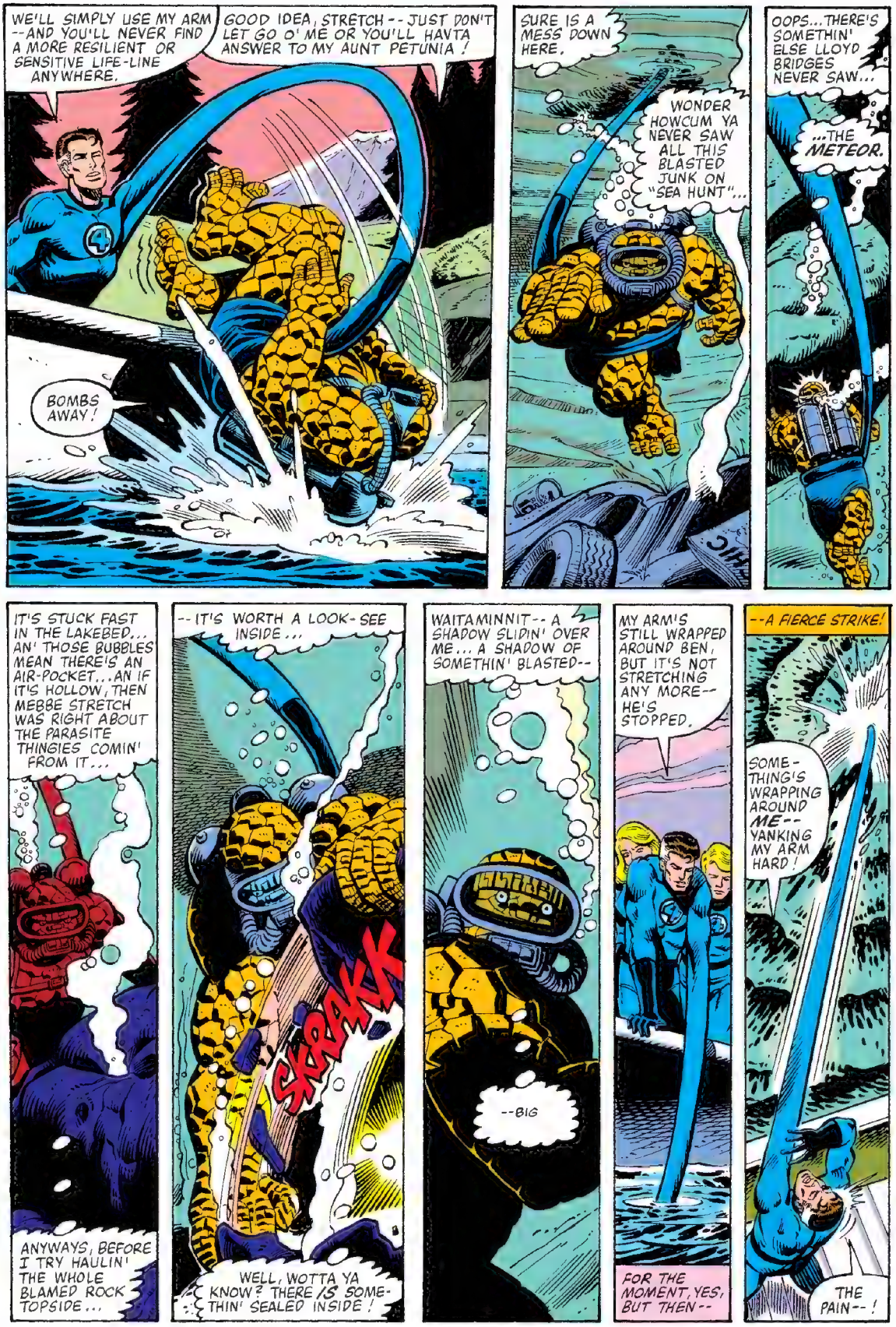

NO? I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN--AND I THINK YOU'RE BEING NAIVE, REED. IF WE HAVEN'T LEARNED BY NOW THAT WE FIND TROUBLE AND DANGER EVERYWHERE WE GO--
YOU'RE EXAGGERATING, SUE.
THERE HAVE BEEN PLENTY OF GOOD, PEACEFUL TIMES. YOU JUST REMEMBER THE BAD TIMES BECAUSE --

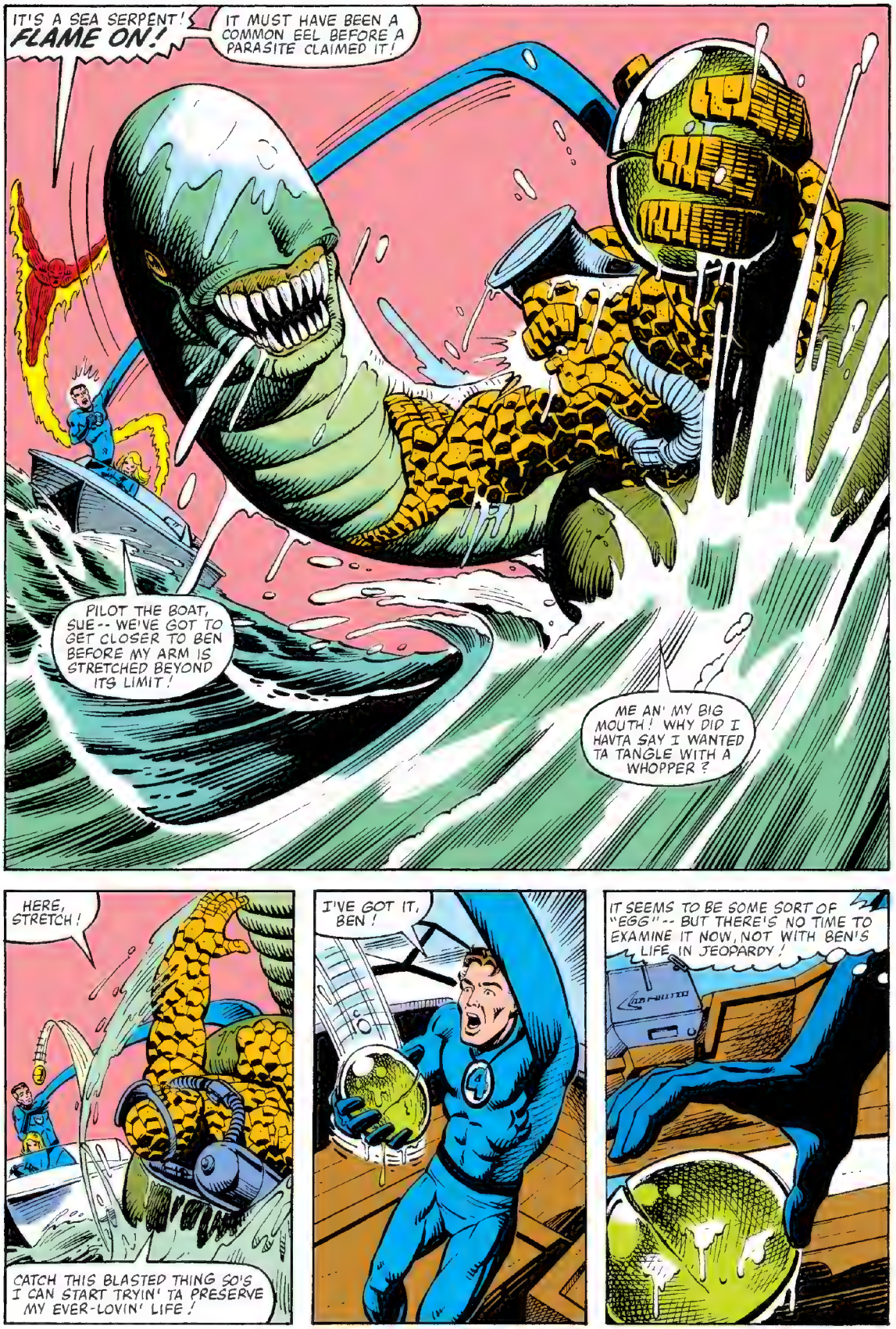

OH, I KNOW, DARLING, AND I APOLOGIZE FOR SNAPPING AT YOU. IT'S JUST THAT... WELL, YOU KNOW HOW I'VE ALWAYS WANTED US TO SETTLE DOWN AND BE A NORMAL FAMILY... AND SOMETIMES IT'S HARD FOR ME TO ACCEPT THE FACT THAT WE AREN'T NORMAL, THAT WE MUST BE WHAT WE ARE...
BUT I DO REALIZE IT, REED...

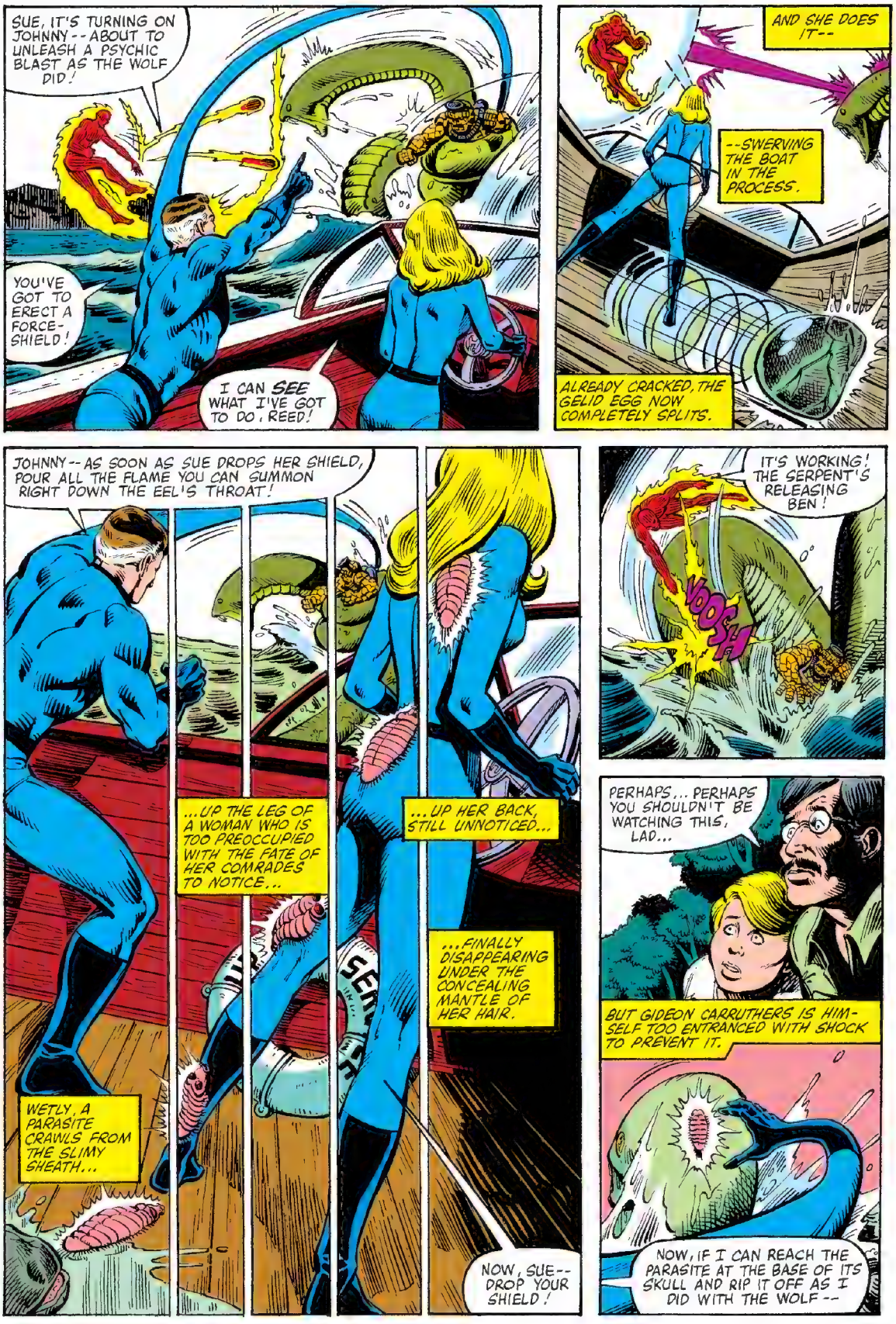
EVEN OUR SON, EVEN FRANKLIN, HAS STRANGE POWERS -- POWERS WE DON'T EVEN UNDERSTAND YET -- BUT FOR BETTER OR WORSE, WE'VE GOT TO ACCEPT OURSELVES AS WE ARE, AND I'LL STAND BY YOU TOMORROW...
...AS YOUR WIFE AND A MEMBER OF THE TEAM...TOMORROW AND ALWAYS.

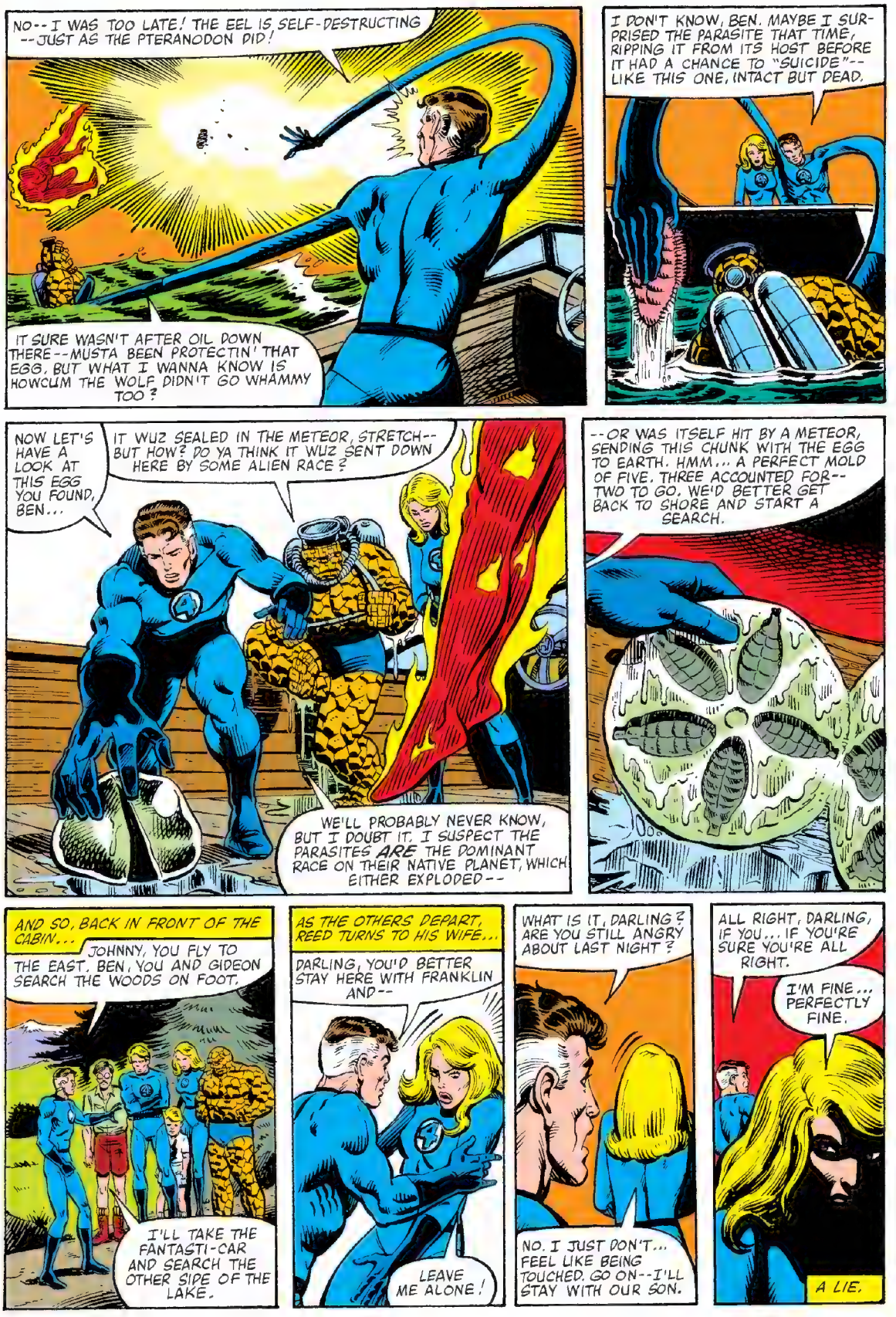

MORNING: BEN GRIMM HAS VOLUNTEERED TO DON THE SCUBA GEAR...
FRANKLIN, YOU STAY ON SHORE WITH DR. CARRUTHERS WHILE I GO IN THE BOAT WITH DADDY -- OKAY, HON?
SURE, MOMMY, WE CAN WATCH FROM THE PIER.

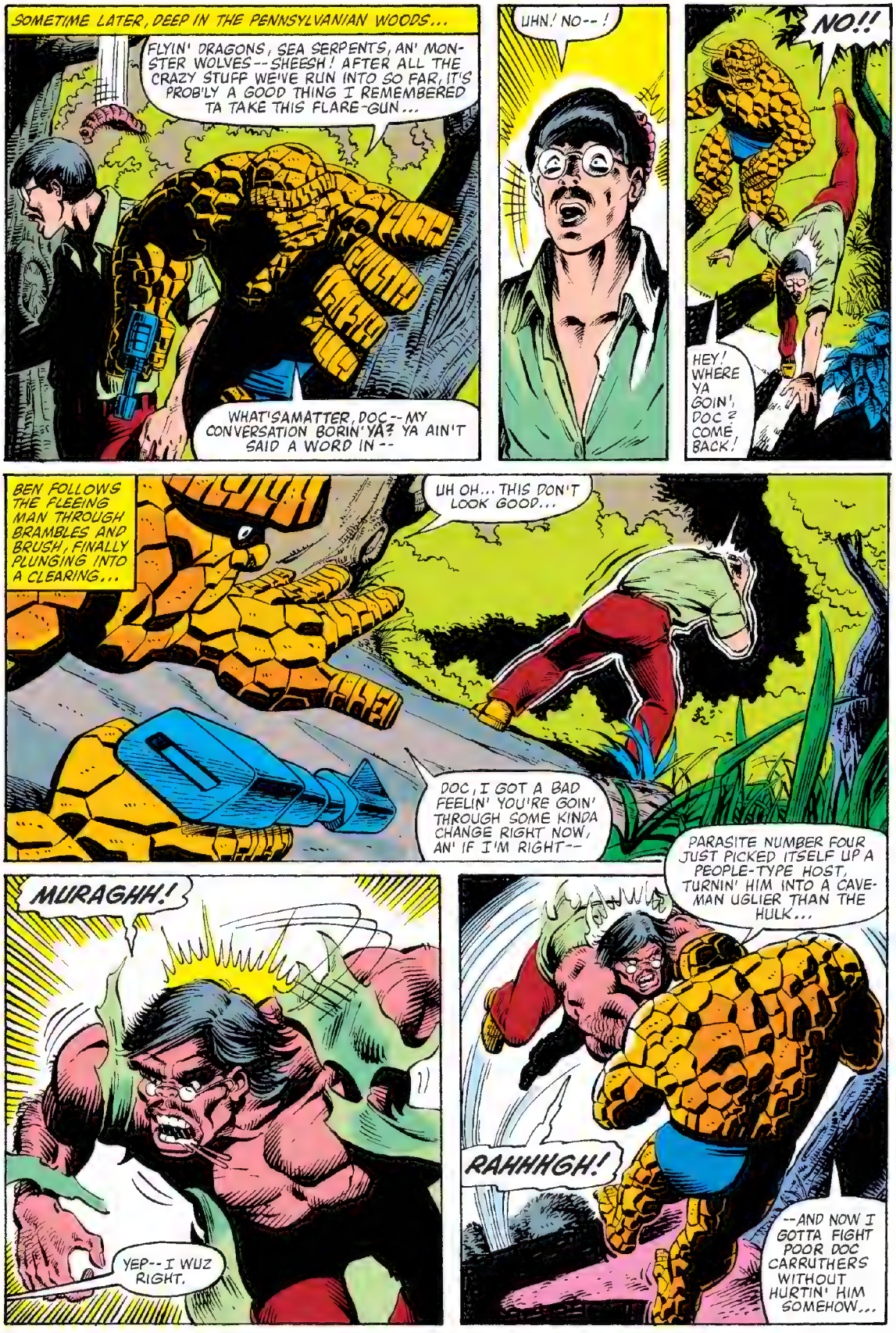

BLASTED WATER SURE IS MURKY. WISH WE'D BROUGHT SOME ROPE SO'S I DON'T GET LOST DOWN THERE.
THERE'S A GOOD SUBSTITUTE, BEN...


WE'LL SIMPLY USE MY ARM --AND YOU'LL NEVER FIND A MORE RESILIENT OR SENSITIVE LIFE-LINE ANYWHERE.
GOOD IDEA, STRETCH -- JUST DON'T LET GO O' ME OR YOU'LL HAVTA ANSWER TO MY AUNT PETUNIA!
BOMBS AWAY!
SURE IS A MESS DOWN HERE.
WONDER HOWCUM YA NEVER SAW ALL THIS BLASTED JUNK ON "SEA HUNT"...
OOPS...THERE'S SOMETHIN' ELSE LLOYD BRIDGES NEVER SAW...
...THE METEOR.
IT'S STUCK FAST IN THE LAKEBED... AN' THOSE BUBBLES MEAN THERE'S AN AIR-POCKET...AN IF IT'S HOLLOW, THEN MEBBE STRETCH WAS RIGHT ABOUT THE PARASITE THINGIES COMIN' FROM IT...
ANYWAYS, BEFORE I TRY HAULIN' THE WHOLE BLAMED ROCK TOPSIDE...
--IT'S WORTH A LOOK- SEE INSIDE...
SKRAKK
WELL, WOTTA YA KNOW? THERE IS SOMETHIN' SEALED INSIDE!
WAITAMINNIT-- A SHADOW SLIDIN' OVER ME... A SHADOW OF SOMETHIN' BLASTED--
--BIG
MY ARM'S STILL WRAPPED AROUND BEN, BUT IT'S NOT STRETCHING ANY MORE-- HE'S STOPPED.
FOR THE MOMENT, YES, BUT THEN--
--A FIERCE STRIKE!
SOMETHING'S WRAPPING AROUND ME-- YANKING MY ARM HARD!
THE PAIN--!


IT'S A SEA SERPENT! FLAME ON!
IT MUST HAVE BEEN A COMMON EEL BEFORE A PARASITE CLAIMED IT!
PILOT THE BOAT, SUE-- WE'VE GOT TO GET CLOSER TO BEN BEFORE MY ARM IS STRETCHED BEYOND ITS LIMIT!
ME AN' MY BIG MOUTH! WHY DID I HAVTA SAY I WANTED TA TANGLE WITH A WHOPPER?
HERE, STRETCH!
CATCH THIS BLASTED THING SO'S I CAN START TRYIN' TA PRESERVE MY EVER-LOVIN' LIFE!
I'VE GOT IT, BEN!
IT SEEMS TO BE SOME SORT OF "EGG"-- BUT THERE'S NO TIME TO EXAMINE IT NOW, NOT WITH BEN'S LIFE IN JEOPARDY!

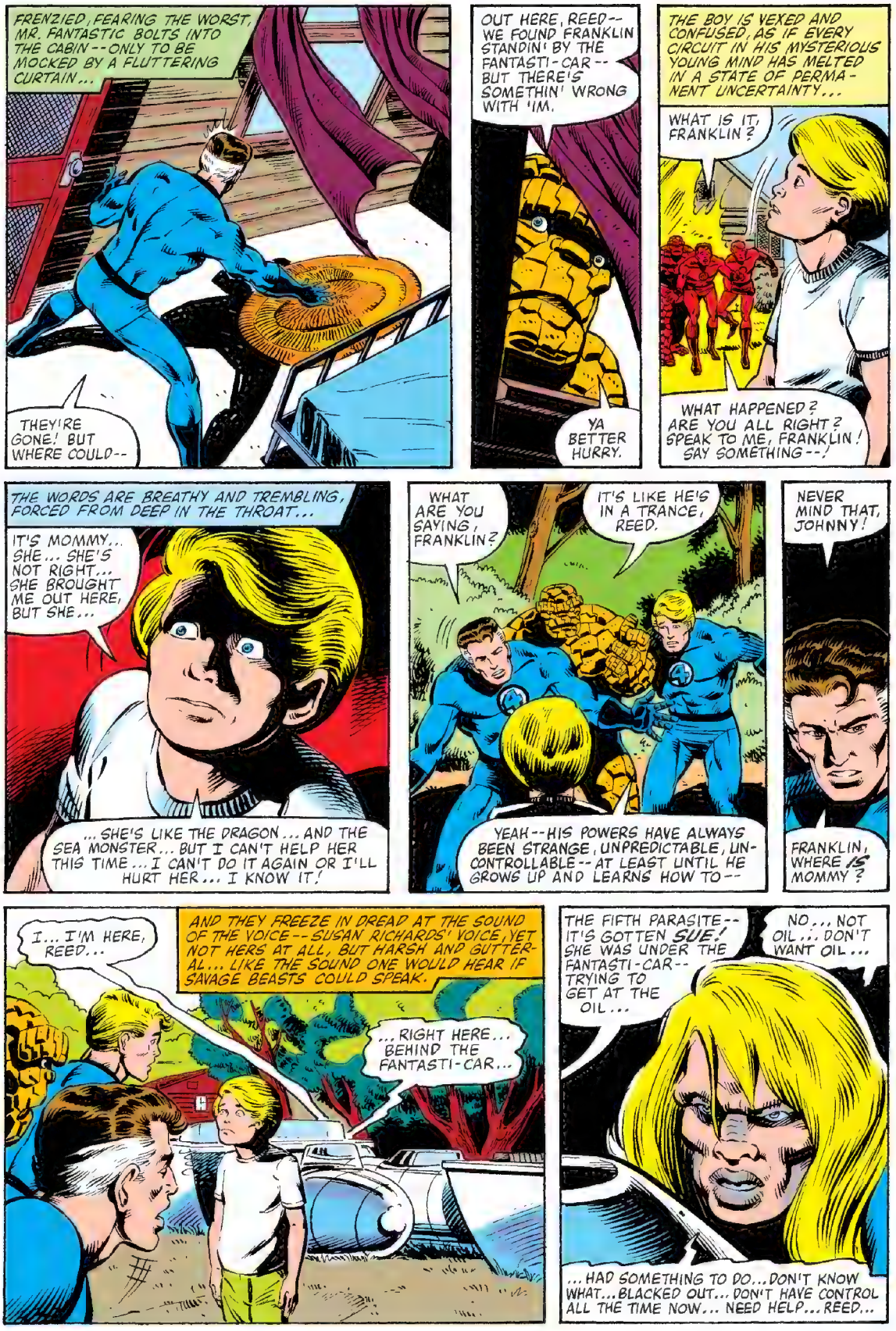

SUE, IT'S TURNING ON JOHNNY--ABOUT TO UNLEASH A PSYCHIC BLAST AS THE WOLF DID!
YOU'VE GOT TO ERECT A FORCE-SHIELD!
I CAN SEE WHAT I'VE GOT TO DO, REED!
AND SHE DOES IT--
--SWERVING THE BOAT IN THE PROCESS.
ALREADY CRACKED, THE GELID EGG NOW COMPLETELY SPLITS.
JOHNNY--AS SOON AS SUE DROPS HER SHIELD, POUR ALL THE FLAME YOU CAN SUMMON RIGHT DOWN THE EEL'S THROAT!
...UP THE LEG OF A WOMAN WHO IS TOO PREOCCUPIED WITH THE FATE OF HER COMRADES TO NOTICE...
...UP HER BACK, STILL UNNOTICED...
...FINALLY DISAPPEARING UNDER THE CONCEALING MANTLE OF HER HAIR.
WETLY, A PARASITE CRAWLS FROM THE SLIMY SHEATH...
NOW, SUE--DROP YOUR SHIELD!
IT'S WORKING! THE SERPENT'S RELEASING BEN!
WOOSH
PERHAPS... PERHAPS YOU SHOULDN'T BE WATCHING THIS, LAD...
BUT GIDEON CARRUTHERS IS HIMSELF TOO ENTRANCED WITH SHOCK TO PREVENT IT.
NOW, IF I CAN REACH THE PARASITE AT THE BASE OF ITS SKULL AND RIP IT OFF AS I DID WITH THE WOLF--

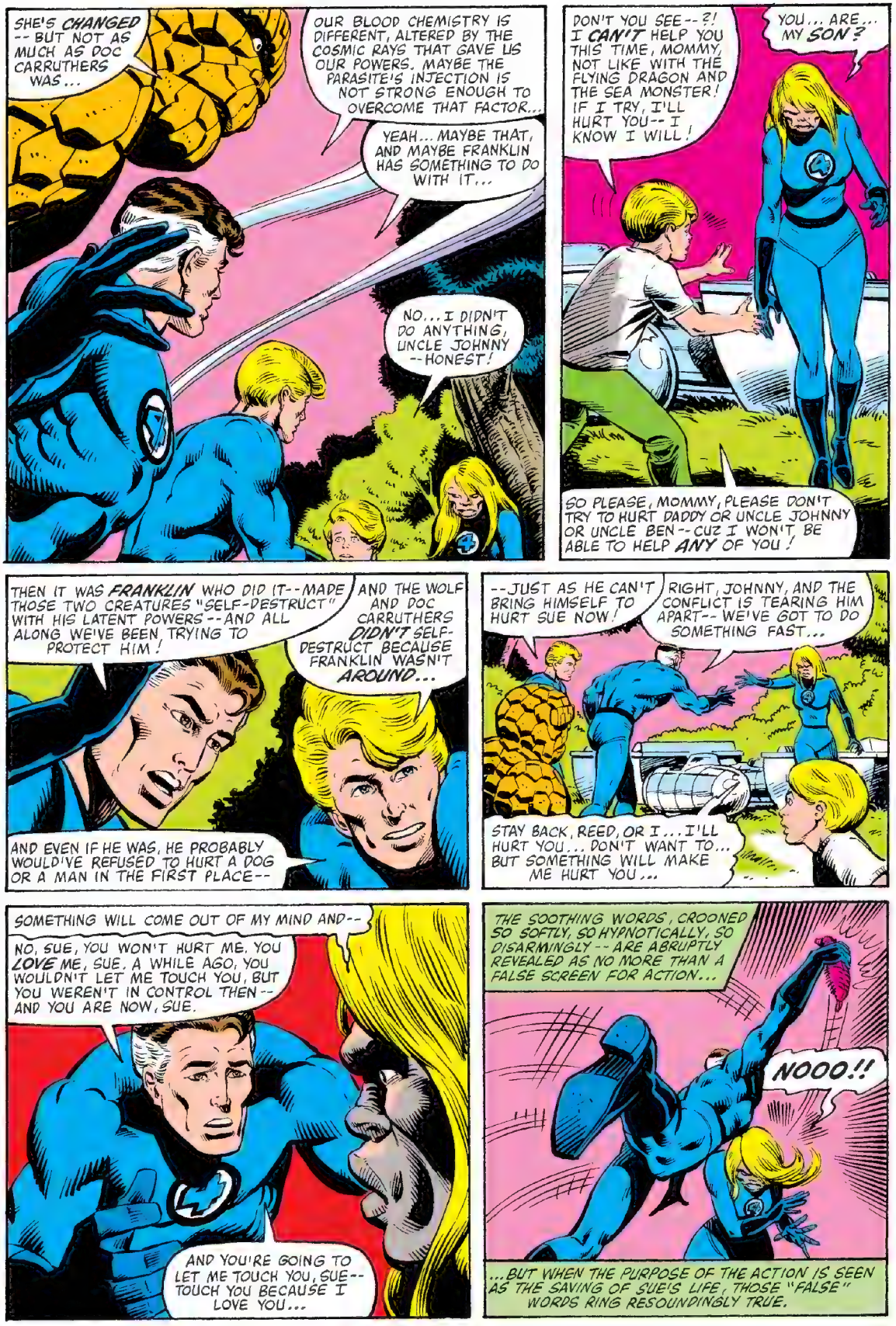

NO--I WAS TOO LATE! THE EEL IS SELF-DESTRUCTING --JUST AS THE PTERANODON DID!
IT SURE WASN'T AFTER OIL DOWN THERE--MUSTA BEEN PROTECTIN' THAT EGG, BUT WHAT I WANNA KNOW IS HOWCUM THE WOLF DIDN'T GO WHAMMY TOO?
I DON'T KNOW, BEN. MAYBE I SURPRISED THE PARASITE THAT TIME, RIPPING IT FROM ITS HOST BEFORE IT HAD A CHANCE TO "SUICIDE"--LIKE THIS ONE, INTACT BUT DEAD.
NOW LET'S HAVE A LOOK AT THIS EGG YOU FOUND, BEN...
IT WUZ SEALED IN THE METEOR, STRETCH--BUT HOW? DO YA THINK IT WUZ SENT DOWN HERE BY SOME ALIEN RACE?
WE'LL PROBABLY NEVER KNOW, BUT I DOUBT IT. I SUSPECT THE PARASITES ARE THE DOMINANT RACE ON THEIR NATIVE PLANET, WHICH EITHER EXPLODED--
--OR WAS ITSELF HIT BY A METEOR, SENDING THIS CHUNK WITH THE EGG TO EARTH. HMM... A PERFECT MOLD OF FIVE. THREE ACCOUNTED FOR--TWO TO GO. WE'D BETTER GET BACK TO SHORE AND START A SEARCH.
AND SO, BACK IN FRONT OF THE CABIN...
JOHNNY, YOU FLY TO THE EAST. BEN, YOU AND GIDEON SEARCH THE WOODS ON FOOT.
I'LL TAKE THE FANTASTI-CAR AND SEARCH THE OTHER SIDE OF THE LAKE.
AS THE OTHERS DEPART, REED TURNS TO HIS WIFE...
DARLING, YOU'D BETTER STAY HERE WITH FRANKLIN AND--
LEAVE ME ALONE!
WHAT IS IT, DARLING? ARE YOU STILL ANGRY ABOUT LAST NIGHT?
NO. I JUST DON'T... FEEL LIKE BEING TOUCHED. GO ON--I'LL STAY WITH OUR SON.
ALL RIGHT, DARLING, IF YOU... IF YOU'RE SURE YOU'RE ALL RIGHT.
I'M FINE... PERFECTLY FINE.
A LIE.

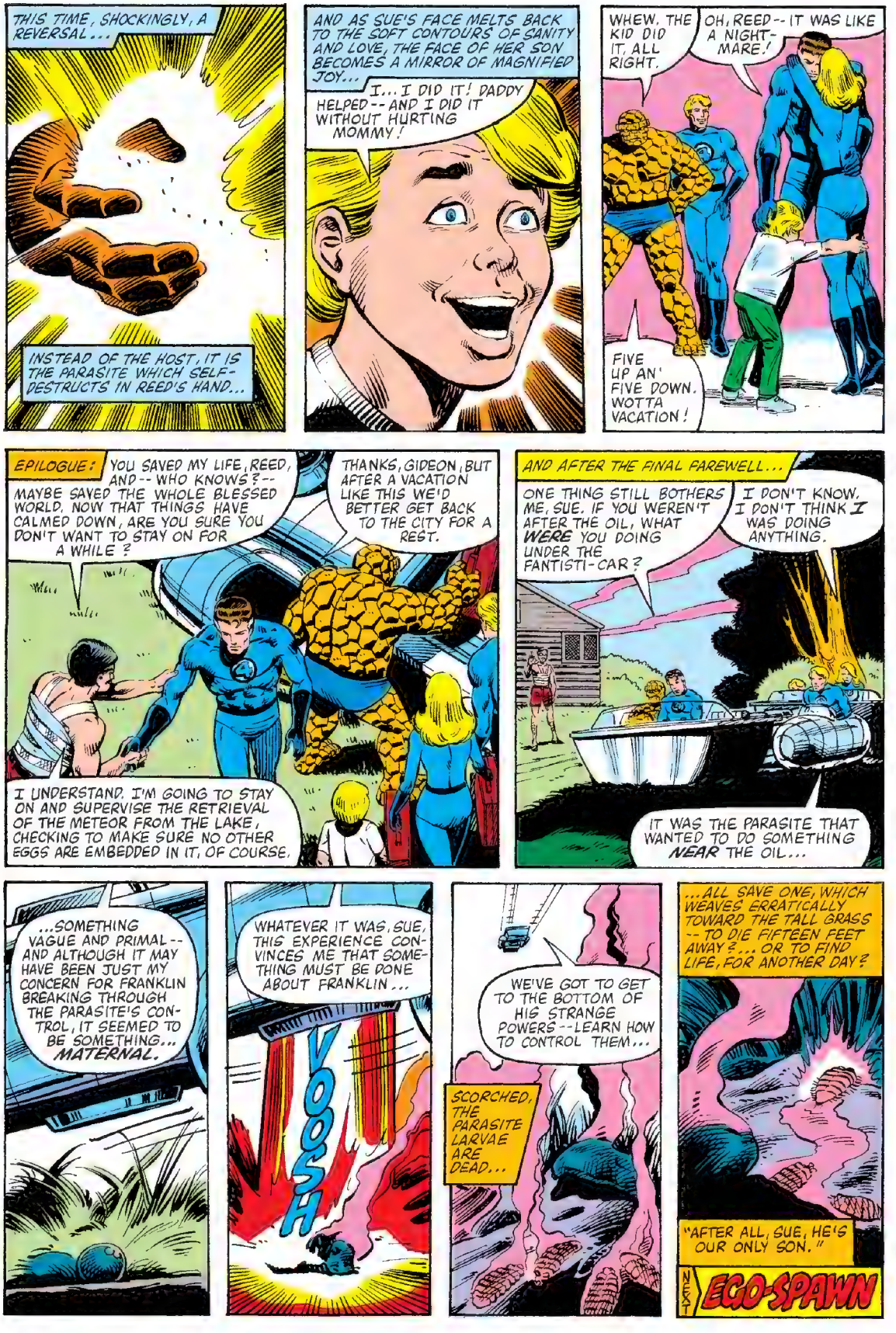

SOMETIME LATER, DEEP IN THE PENNSYLVANIAN WOODS...
FLYIN' DRAGONS, SEA SERPENTS, AN' MONSTER WOLVES--SHEESH! AFTER ALL THE CRAZY STUFF WE'VE RUN INTO SO FAR, IT'S PROB'LY A GOOD THING I REMEMBERED TA TAKE THIS FLARE-GUN...
WHAT'SAMATTER, DOC--MY CONVERSATION BORIN' YA? YA AIN'T SAID A WORD IN--
UHN! NO--!
NO!!
HEY! WHERE YA GOIN', DOC? COME BACK!
BEN FOLLOWS THE FLEEING MAN THROUGH BRAMBLES AND BRUSH, FINALLY PLUNGING INTO A CLEARING...
UH OH... THIS DON'T LOOK GOOD...
DOC, I GOT A BAD FEELIN' YOU'RE GOIN' THROUGH SOME KINDA CHANGE RIGHT NOW, AN' IF I'M RIGHT--
MURAGHH!
YEP--I WUZ RIGHT.
PARASITE NUMBER FOUR JUST PICKED ITSELF UP A PEOPLE-TYPE HOST, TURNIN' HIM INTO A CAVEMAN UGLIER THAN THE HULK...
RAHHHGH!
--AND NOW I GOTTA FIGHT POOR DOC CARRUTHERS WITHOUT HURTIN' HIM SOMEHOW...

NOT ONLY THAT, BUT I GOTTA GET THE PARASITE-THINGIE OFF HIS NECK BEFORE HE BLOWS HIMSELF UP!
WUMP
EASIER SAID, HOWEVER, THAN DONE...
ZHAMM
MURAHHRRR!
UHN! THAT BLAMED MIND-BLAST AGAIN!
TAKES THE STARCH EVEN OUTTA ME--!
CHOOF
GOTTA USE THE FLARE... TA CALL THE OTHERS...
...AN' TRY TA FOLLOW 'IM... TILL MY STRENGTH COMES BACK...
BEN'S FLARE!
4
IT'S COMING FROM BACK NEAR THE CABIN!
INDEED, FOR THE BRUTISH NEANDERTHAL MAN WHO WAS ONCE THE NATION'S FOREMOST GEOLOGIST--
--IS NOW NO MORE THAN A SLAVE, BONDED BODY AND MIND TO A HUNGRY ALIEN PARASITE!
THE HOLDING TANK, BEN-- THE CABIN'S HEATING OIL!
YEAH-- I'LL DISTRACT HIM, TORCHIE, AND ONCE HE'S FAR ENOUGH AWAY YOU HIT THE OIL!

AN UPROOTED TREE OUGHTTA GRAB HIS ATTENTION--
WRUNCHT
--ONCE I TOSS IT A HAIR SHORT OF HIS HEAD ANYWAYS!
MRAHH--?
KRUMP
COME ON, YA BIG APE-- REMEMBER ME? COME AN' GET ME!
THE TAUNT SUCCEEDS--
--AND WHEN THE CARRUTHERS-NEANDERTHAL LUMBERS AWAY FROM THE OIL...
NOW, TORCH! HIT IT BEFORE HE BLASTS ME WITH ANOTHER ONE O' THEM PSYCHIC WHAMMIES!
VOOSH
WHOOH
THE SPILLED OIL GOES UP LIKE A BOMB, PITCHING CARRUTHERS HIGH INTO THE AIR -- AND EVEN BEFORE THE MAN HITS THE GROUND, BEN GRIMM IS READY TO POUNCE...
GOT THE LOUSY THING -- AND NEITHER ONE OF 'EM SELF-DESTRUCTED!
HIS BACK'S A LITTLE CHARBROILED, BUT IF ALL GOES ACCORDING TA HOYLE--
--THE GOOD DOC OUGHTTA CHANGE BACK TA NORMAL JUST LIKE THE WOLF DID.
WH-WHAT... HAPPENED TO... ME...?
LOOK, BEN -- REED'S COMING BACK IN THE FANTASTI-CAR!
I SAW THE FLARE! WHAT'S -- OH, NO! THE CABIN'S STARTING TO BURN -- SUE AND FRANKLIN ARE IN THERE!
WHAT--?! BUT I THOUGHT THEY WERE GOING WITH YOU, REED!


FRENZIED, FEARING THE WORST, MR. FANTASTIC BOLTS INTO THE CABIN--ONLY TO BE MOCKED BY A FLUTTERING CURTAIN...
THEY'RE GONE! BUT WHERE COULD--
OUT HERE, REED--WE FOUND FRANKLIN STANDIN' BY THE FANTASTI-CAR--BUT THERE'S SOMETHIN' WRONG WITH 'IM.
YA BETTER HURRY.
THE BOY IS VEXED AND CONFUSED, AS IF EVERY CIRCUIT IN HIS MYSTERIOUS YOUNG MIND HAS MELTED IN A STATE OF PERMA-NENT UNCERTAINTY...
WHAT IS IT, FRANKLIN?
WHAT HAPPENED? ARE YOU ALL RIGHT? SPEAK TO ME, FRANKLIN! SAY SOMETHING--!
THE WORDS ARE BREATHY AND TREMBLING, FORCED FROM DEEP IN THE THROAT...
IT'S MOMMY... SHE... SHE'S NOT RIGHT... SHE BROUGHT ME OUT HERE, BUT SHE...
...SHE'S LIKE THE DRAGON... AND THE SEA MONSTER... BUT I CAN'T HELP HER THIS TIME... I CAN'T DO IT AGAIN OR I'LL HURT HER... I KNOW IT!
WHAT ARE YOU SAYING, FRANKLIN?
IT'S LIKE HE'S IN A TRANCE, REED.
YEAH--HIS POWERS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN STRANGE, UNPREDICTABLE, UN-CONTROLLABLE--AT LEAST UNTIL HE GROWS UP AND LEARNS HOW TO--
NEVER MIND THAT, JOHNNY!
FRANKLIN, WHERE IS MOMMY?
I... I'M HERE, REED...
AND THEY FREEZE IN DREAD AT THE SOUND OF THE VOICE--SUSAN RICHARDS' VOICE, YET NOT HERS AT ALL, BUT HARSH AND GUTTER-AL... LIKE THE SOUND ONE WOULD HEAR IF SAVAGE BEASTS COULD SPEAK.
...RIGHT HERE... BEHIND THE FANTASTI-CAR...
THE FIFTH PARASITE--IT'S GOTTEN SUE! SHE WAS UNDER THE FANTASTI-CAR--TRYING TO GET AT THE OIL...
NO... NOT OIL... DON'T WANT OIL...
...HAD SOMETHING TO DO... DON'T KNOW WHAT... BLACKED OUT... DON'T HAVE CONTROL ALL THE TIME NOW... NEED HELP... REED...


SHE'S CHANGED -- BUT NOT AS MUCH AS DOC CARRUTHERS WAS...
OUR BLOOD CHEMISTRY IS DIFFERENT, ALTERED BY THE COSMIC RAYS THAT GAVE US OUR POWERS. MAYBE THE PARASITE'S INJECTION IS NOT STRONG ENOUGH TO OVERCOME THAT FACTOR...
YEAH... MAYBE THAT, AND MAYBE FRANKLIN HAS SOMETHING TO DO WITH IT...
NO... I DIDN'T DO ANYTHING, UNCLE JOHNNY --HONEST!
DON'T YOU SEE--?! I CAN'T HELP YOU THIS TIME, MOMMY, NOT LIKE WITH THE FLYING DRAGON AND THE SEA MONSTER! IF I TRY, I'LL HURT YOU-- I KNOW I WILL!
YOU... ARE... MY SON?
SO PLEASE, MOMMY, PLEASE DON'T TRY TO HURT DADDY OR UNCLE JOHNNY OR UNCLE BEN--CUZ I WON'T BE ABLE TO HELP ANY OF YOU!
THEN IT WAS FRANKLIN WHO DID IT--MADE THOSE TWO CREATURES "SELF-DESTRUCT" WITH HIS LATENT POWERS--AND ALL ALONG WE'VE BEEN TRYING TO PROTECT HIM!
AND THE WOLF AND DOC CARRUTHERS DIDN'T SELF-DESTRUCT BECAUSE FRANKLIN WASN'T AROUND...
AND EVEN IF HE WAS, HE PROBABLY WOULD'VE REFUSED TO HURT A DOG OR A MAN IN THE FIRST PLACE--
--JUST AS HE CAN'T BRING HIMSELF TO HURT SUE NOW!
RIGHT, JOHNNY, AND THE CONFLICT IS TEARING HIM APART-- WE'VE GOT TO DO SOMETHING FAST...
STAY BACK, REED, OR I... I'LL HURT YOU... DON'T WANT TO... BUT SOMETHING WILL MAKE ME HURT YOU...
SOMETHING WILL COME OUT OF MY MIND AND--
NO, SUE, YOU WON'T HURT ME. YOU LOVE ME, SUE. A WHILE AGO, YOU WOULDN'T LET ME TOUCH YOU, BUT YOU WEREN'T IN CONTROL THEN-- AND YOU ARE NOW, SUE.
AND YOU'RE GOING TO LET ME TOUCH YOU, SUE-- TOUCH YOU BECAUSE I LOVE YOU...
THE SOOTHING WORDS, CROONED SO SOFTLY, SO HYPNOTICALLY, SO DISARMINGLY -- ARE ABRUPTLY REVEALED AS NO MORE THAN A FALSE SCREEN FOR ACTION...
NOOO!!
...BUT WHEN THE PURPOSE OF THE ACTION IS SEEN AS THE SAVING OF SUE'S LIFE, THOSE "FALSE" WORDS RING RESOUNDINGLY TRUE.


THIS TIME, SHOCKINGLY, A REVERSAL...
INSTEAD OF THE HOST, IT IS THE PARASITE WHICH SELF-DESTRUCTS IN REED'S HAND...
AND AS SUE'S FACE MELTS BACK TO THE SOFT CONTOURS OF SANITY AND LOVE, THE FACE OF HER SON BECOMES A MIRROR OF MAGNIFIED JOY...
I... I DID IT! DADDY HELPED -- AND I DID IT WITHOUT HURTING MOMMY!
WHEW. THE KID DID IT, ALL RIGHT.
OH, REED -- IT WAS LIKE A NIGHT-MARE!
FIVE UP AN' FIVE DOWN. WOTTA VACATION!
EPILOGUE: YOU SAVED MY LIFE, REED, AND -- WHO KNOWS? -- MAYBE SAVED THE WHOLE BLESSED WORLD. NOW THAT THINGS HAVE CALMED DOWN, ARE YOU SURE YOU DON'T WANT TO STAY ON FOR A WHILE?
THANKS, GIDEON, BUT AFTER A VACATION LIKE THIS WE'D BETTER GET BACK TO THE CITY FOR A REST.
I UNDERSTAND. I'M GOING TO STAY ON AND SUPERVISE THE RETRIEVAL OF THE METEOR FROM THE LAKE, CHECKING TO MAKE SURE NO OTHER EGGS ARE EMBEDDED IN IT, OF COURSE.
AND AFTER THE FINAL FAREWELL...
ONE THING STILL BOTHERS ME, SUE. IF YOU WEREN'T AFTER THE OIL, WHAT WERE YOU DOING UNDER THE FANTISTI-CAR?
I DON'T KNOW. I DON'T THINK I WAS DOING ANYTHING.
IT WAS THE PARASITE THAT WANTED TO DO SOMETHING NEAR THE OIL...
...SOMETHING VAGUE AND PRIMAL -- AND ALTHOUGH IT MAY HAVE BEEN JUST MY CONCERN FOR FRANKLIN BREAKING THROUGH THE PARASITE'S CONTROL, IT SEEMED TO BE SOMETHING... MATERNAL.
WHATEVER IT WAS, SUE, THIS EXPERIENCE CONVINCES ME THAT SOMETHING MUST BE DONE ABOUT FRANKLIN...
VOOSH
WE'VE GOT TO GET TO THE BOTTOM OF HIS STRANGE POWERS -- LEARN HOW TO CONTROL THEM...
SCORCHED, THE PARASITE LARVAE ARE DEAD...
...ALL SAVE ONE, WHICH WEAVES ERRATICALLY TOWARD THE TALL GRASS -- TO DIE FIFTEEN FEET AWAY?... OR TO FIND LIFE, FOR ANOTHER DAY?
"AFTER ALL, SUE, HE'S OUR ONLY SON."
NEXT EGO-SPAWN

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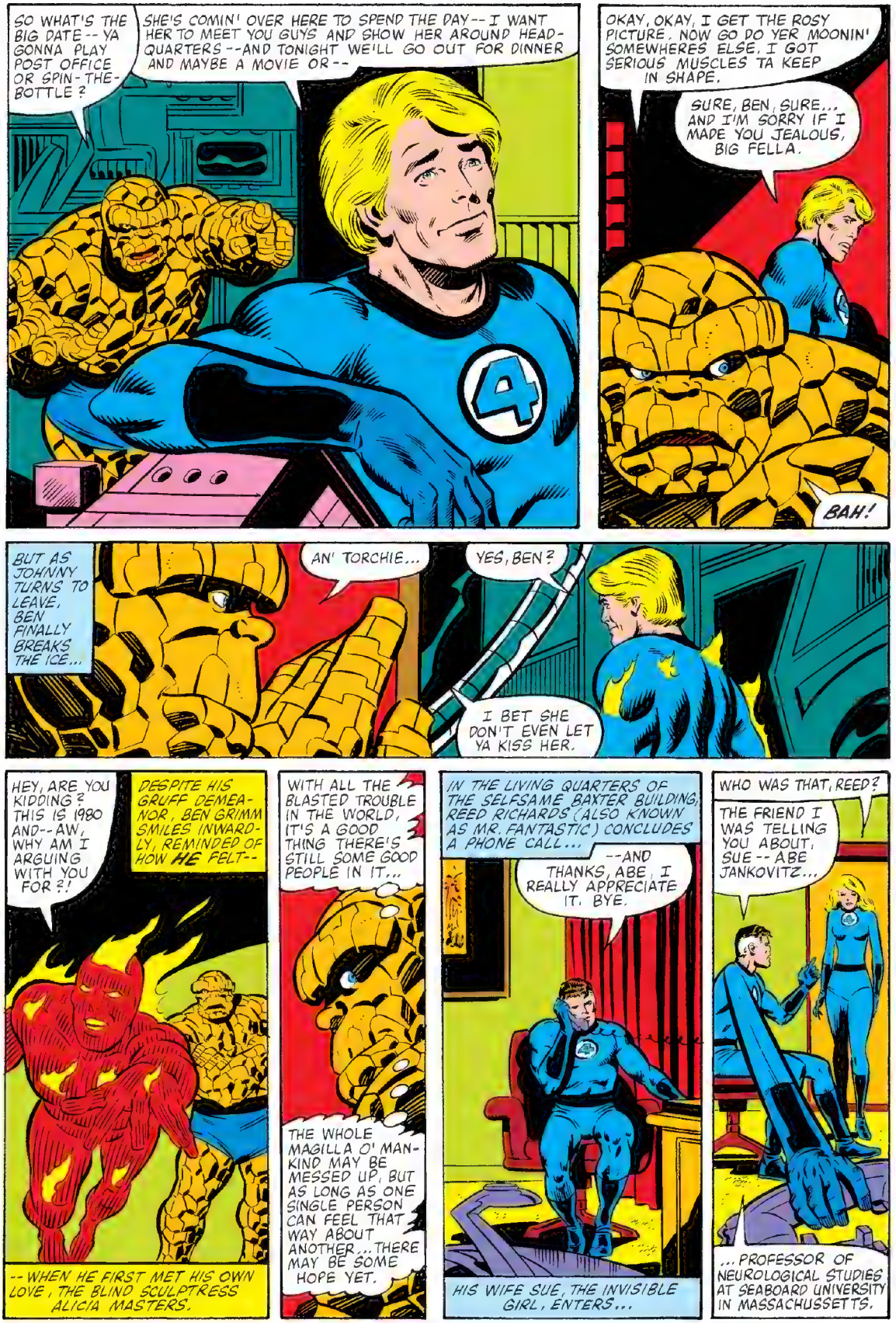
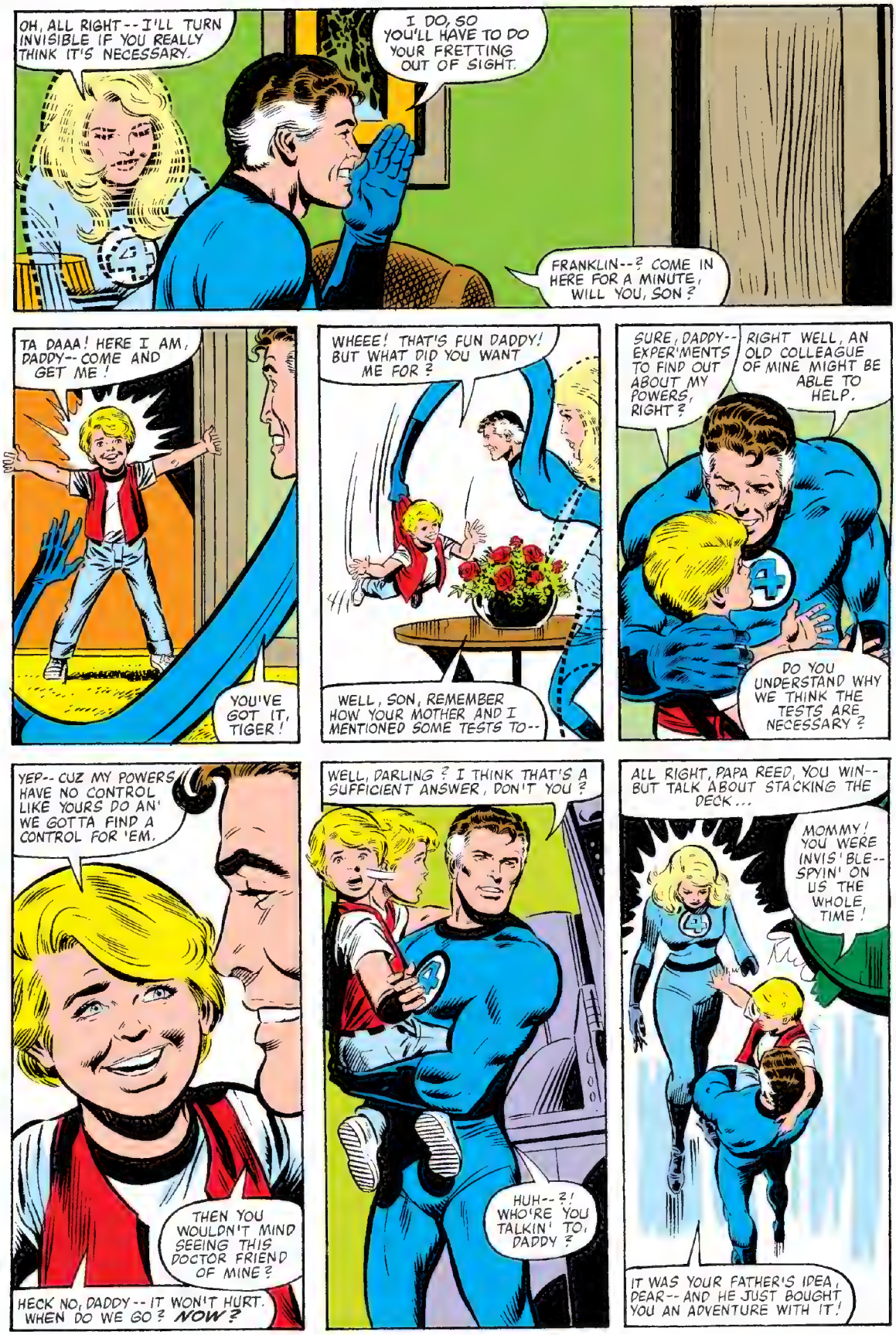
THE F.F. SEEK THE SECRET OF FRANKLIN'S POWERS...ONLY TO FIND THE...
ECO-SPAWN!

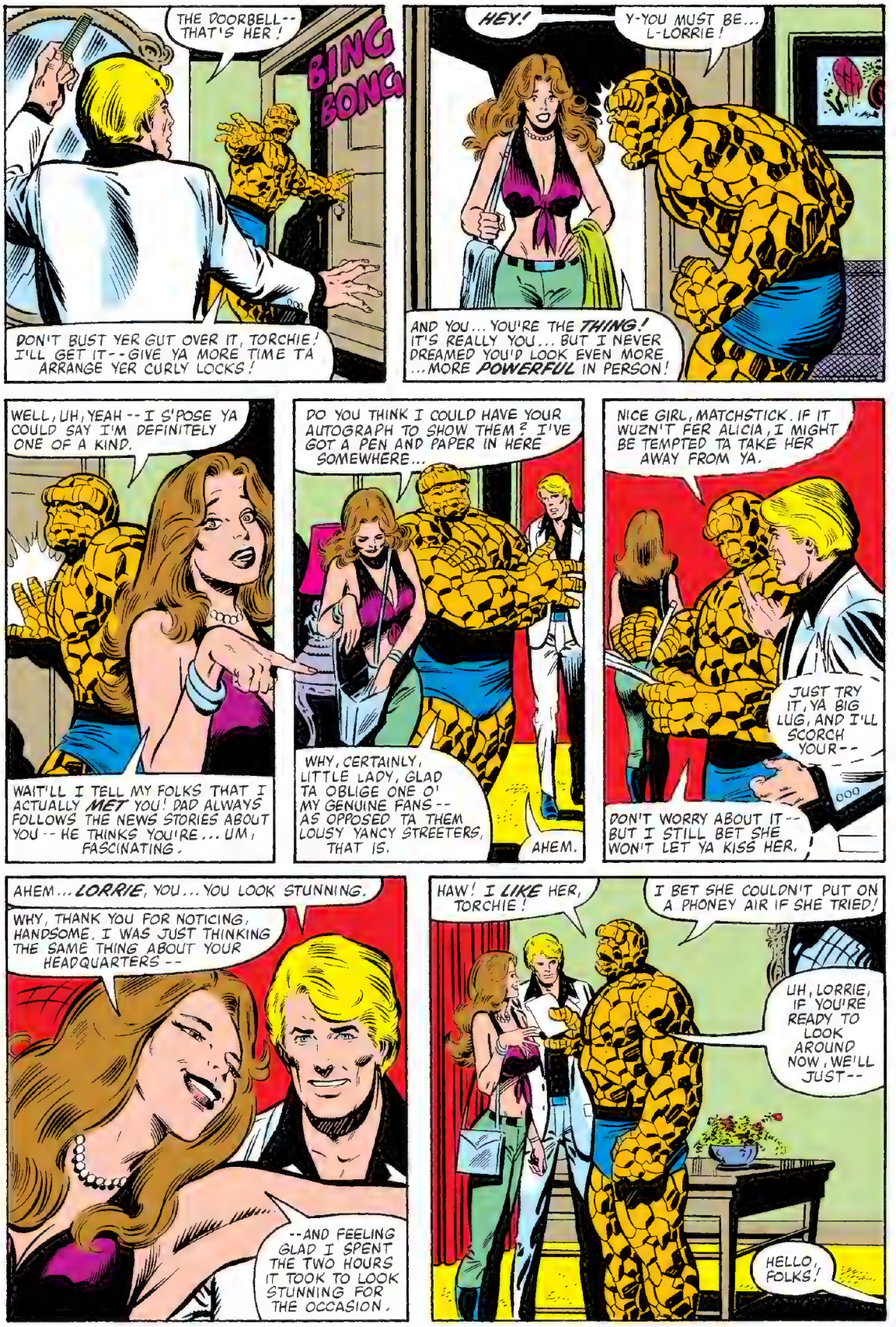
Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE FANTASTIC FOUR!®
EGO-SPAWN
THE BAXTER BUILDING -- WHERE BASHFUL BENJAMIN GRIMM'S DAILY WORKOUT IS RUDELY INTERRUPTED BY THE INCENDIARY APPEARANCE OF THE HUMAN TORCH...
CONGRATULATE ME, BEN -- TODAY IS THE FIRST DAY OF THE REST OF MY LIFE! BRIGHT IS THE LIGHT THAT FILLS MY DAY
IN SHORT, YOU WONDERFUL LUMMOX, I'VE GOT HAPPY FEET AND I FEEL LIKE JUMPIN' FOR JOY!
WOT IN THE--?!
I DON'T CARE IF YA FEEL LIKE DIVIN' FER DESPAIR, YA BLAZIN' BUFFOON! WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA -- YA TRYIN' TA GIVE ME HEART-FAILURE?!
MOST MEN WOULD QUAIL IN STARK TERROR AT THE SOUND OF THE THING'S WRATH -- BUT JOHNNY STORM MERELY WHOOPS AND SOARS ANEW...
DOUG MOENCH WRITER | BILL SIENKIEWICZ LAYOUTS | JOE SINNOTT FINISHES | JIM NOVAK LETTERER | GEORGE ROUSSOS COLORIST | JIM SALICRUP EDITOR | JIM SHOOTER ED.-IN-CHIEF

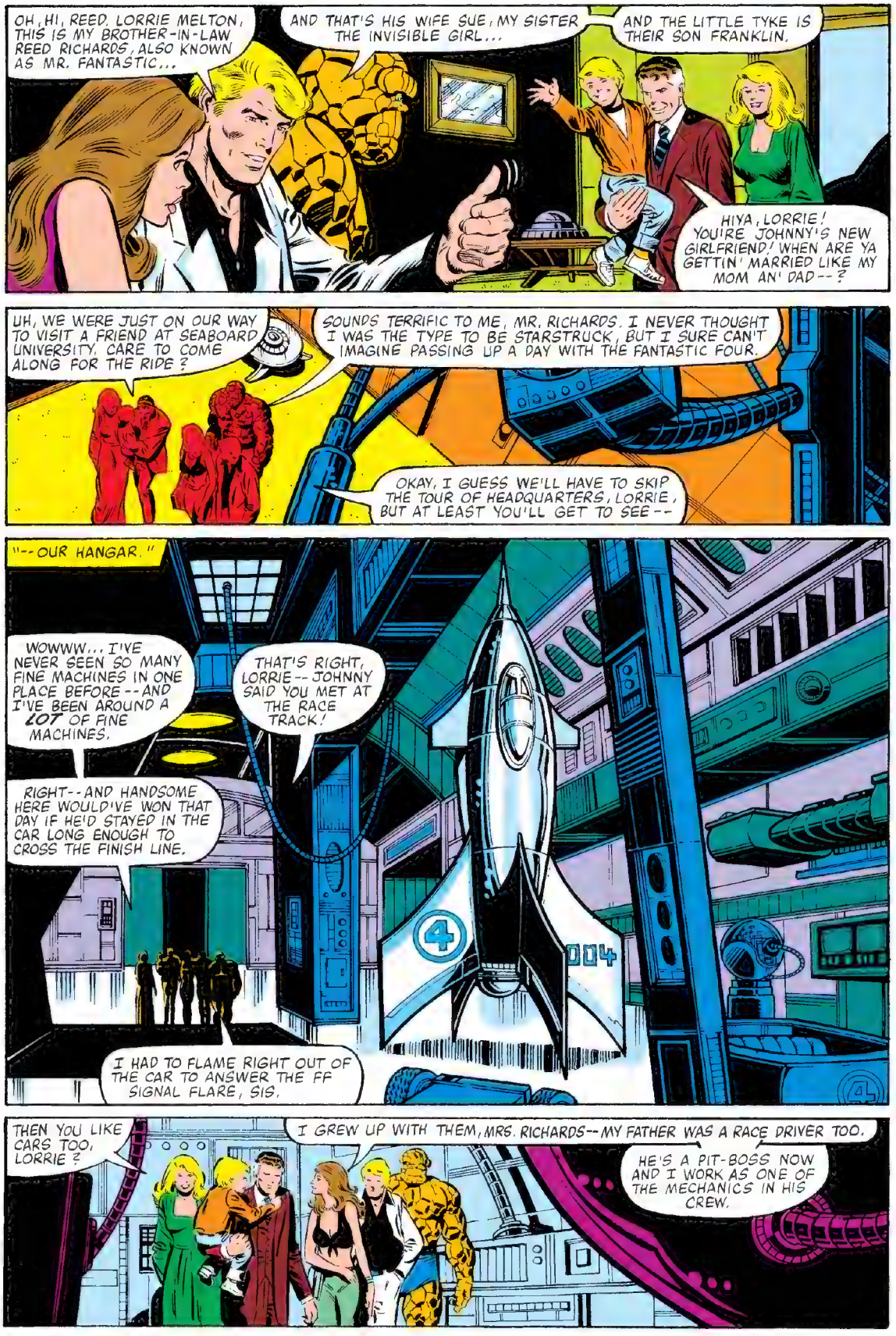
NOW LOOK WHAT YA MADE ME DO! IT'LL TAKE ME ALL MORNIN' JUST TA STRAIGHTEN OUT THE BLASTED FLOOR!
KRUNSCH
RANT AND RAVE ALL YOU WANT, BEN--GET IT OUT OF YOUR CRABBY SYSTEM...
... BUT DON'T EXPECT ME TO JOIN IN, OLD BUDDY--ME, I'M FEELING TOO GOOD TO TAKE THE BAIT AND FIGHT!
WHAT'S WITH YOU ANYWAY, MATCHSTICK? WHY THE DISGUSTIN DISPLAY OF JOY? YOU AIN'T ACTED LIKE THIS IN MONTHS--MEBBE YEARS, COME TA THINK OF IT.
I'VE GOT A DATE, YOU LOVEABLE ORANGE-SKINNED LUNK!
A DATE--?! SO BIG DEAL! YOU'VE HAD A ZILLION DATES IN THE PAST--AN' NONE OF 'EM EVER MADE YA CARRY ON LIKE THIS!
SHEESH!
MAYBE IT'S 'CAUSE I WAS YOUNGER THEN AND TOOK IT ALL FOR GRANTED. BUT NOW THAT I'M OLDER AND SHE'S MADE ME FEEL YOUNG AGAIN--
OLDER--?! FAT CHANCE, PUNK. FROM WHERE I'M STANDIN', YOU'RE STILL WET BEHIND THE EARS.
JUST WHO IS THIS DREAM-GAL YOU'RE CARRYIN' A TORCH FOR, ANYWAY?
HER NAME'S LORRIE, BEN, AND SHE'S GOT POWER TO DRIVE ANY GUY BATTY...
"I MET HER ABOUT A MONTH AGO AT THE JERSEY SPEEDWAY--JUST BEFORE THE BIG TROUBLE WITH LITTLE FRANKLIN..."
MY NAME'S LORRIE--FROM THE PIT-CREW--AND I'VE GOT A JACUZZI AT MY PLACE, HANDSOME...
YOU DO--?
I JUST PHONED HER, BEN, AND I TELL YOU SHE DOES THINGS TO ME, JUST THE SOUND OF HER VOICE. MAYBE I'M NOT THAT OLD, BUT I HAVE BEEN AROUND--YOU'VE GOTTA ADMIT THAT--AND I NEVER THOUGHT ANY GIRL COULD BRING BACK THAT FIRST THRILL OF PUPPY LOVE, THAT BUBBLY FEELING OF--
STOP--PLEASE--YOU'RE MAKIN' ME SICK!

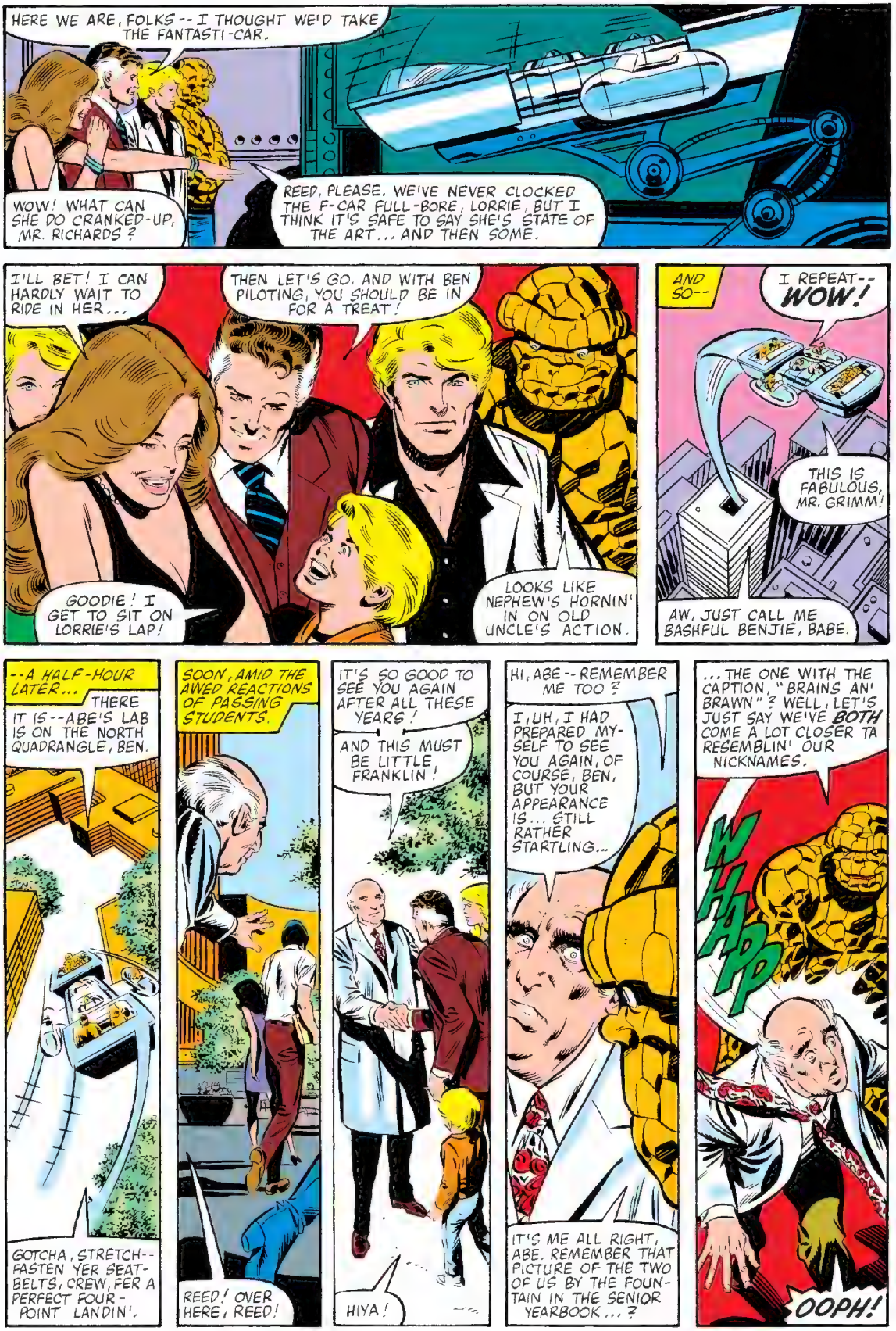

SO WHAT'S THE BIG DATE -- YA GONNA PLAY POST OFFICE OR SPIN-THE-BOTTLE?
SHE'S COMIN' OVER HERE TO SPEND THE DAY -- I WANT HER TO MEET YOU GUYS AND SHOW HER AROUND HEADQUARTERS -- AND TONIGHT WE'LL GO OUT FOR DINNER AND MAYBE A MOVIE OR --
OKAY, OKAY, I GET THE ROSY PICTURE. NOW GO DO YER MOONIN' SOMEWHERES ELSE. I GOT SERIOUS MUSCLES TA KEEP IN SHAPE.
SURE, BEN, SURE... AND I'M SORRY IF I MADE YOU JEALOUS, BIG FELLA.
BAH!
BUT AS JOHNNY TURNS TO LEAVE, BEN FINALLY BREAKS THE ICE...
AN' TORCHIE...
YES, BEN?
I BET SHE DON'T EVEN LET YA KISS HER.
HEY, ARE YOU KIDDING? THIS IS 1980 AND -- AW, WHY AM I ARGUING WITH YOU FOR?!
DESPITE HIS GRUFF DEMEANOR, BEN GRIMM SMILES INWARDLY, REMINDED OF HOW HE FELT --
-- WHEN HE FIRST MET HIS OWN LOVE, THE BLIND SCULPTRESS ALICIA MASTERS.
WITH ALL THE BLASTED TROUBLE IN THE WORLD, IT'S A GOOD THING THERE'S STILL SOME GOOD PEOPLE IN IT...
THE WHOLE MAGILLA O' MANKIND MAY BE MESSED UP, BUT AS LONG AS ONE SINGLE PERSON CAN FEEL THAT WAY ABOUT ANOTHER... THERE MAY BE SOME HOPE YET.
IN THE LIVING QUARTERS OF THE SELFSAME BAXTER BUILDING, REED RICHARDS (ALSO KNOWN AS MR. FANTASTIC) CONCLUDES A PHONE CALL...
--AND THANKS, ABE, I REALLY APPRECIATE IT. BYE.
HIS WIFE SUE, THE INVISIBLE GIRL, ENTERS...
WHO WAS THAT, REED?
THE FRIEND I WAS TELLING YOU ABOUT, SUE -- ABE JANKOVITZ...
... PROFESSOR OF NEUROLOGICAL STUDIES AT SEABOARD UNIVERSITY IN MASSACHUSSETTS.

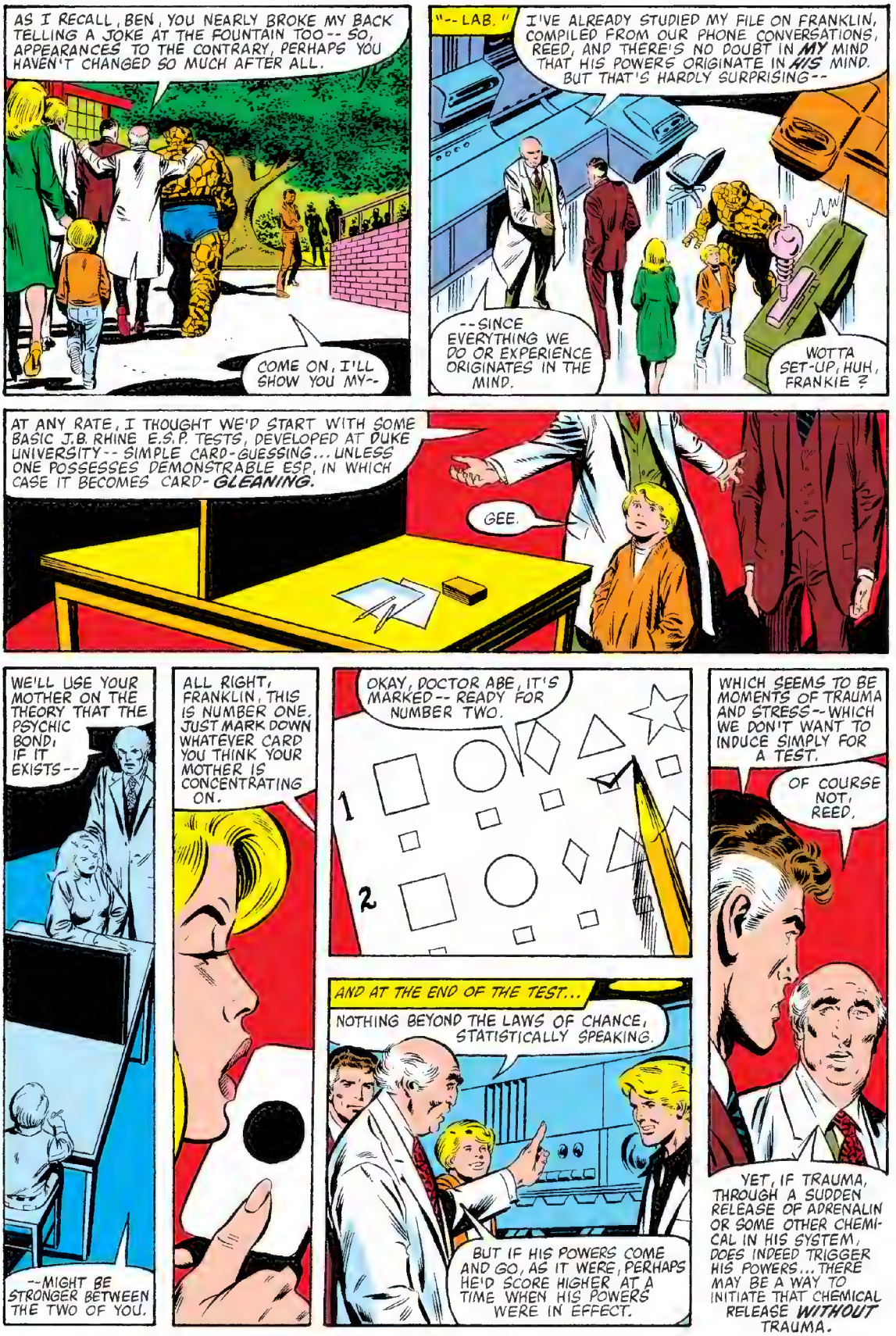
WE WERE COLLEGE CLASSMATES, SUE. HE, UH, SAID WE COULD COME UP... TODAY.
TODAY--? BUT REED, DO YOU REALLY THINK WE SHOULD SPRING IT ON FRANKLIN SO SUDDENLY?
DARLING, WE AGREED THAT SOMETHING SHOULD BE DONE SOON. FRANKLIN'S POWERS ARE TOO UNPREDICTABLE -- TOO DANGEROUS.
AND JUST THINK ABOUT EVERYTHING THAT'S HAPPENED TO HIM RECENTLY...
"FIRST, HE WAS POSSESSED BY NICHOLAS SCRATCH, WHO TRIED TO CONVERT FRANKLIN'S LATENT POWER TO A TOOL OF EVIL. WE WERE LUCKY, SUE, TO SAVE OUR SON'S LIFE--
"--LET ALONE DEFEAT SCRATCH.
"THEN THERE WERE THE BRAIN PARASITES WHICH REGRESSED YOU TO A SUBHUMAN STATE...
"WE NEVER DREAMED THAT FRANKLIN'S POWERS COULD DESTROY THE PARASITES... AND WHAT IF HE'D INADVERTENTLY DESTROYED YOU AS WELL--?
WE'VE GOT TO GET TO THE ROOT OF IT, SUE-- FIND OUT EXACTLY WHAT HIS POWERS ARE AND WHETHER HE CAN LEARN TO CONTROL THEM.
I KNOW, REED, AND I AGREE COMPLETELY... BUT HE'S SO YOUNG.
IF WE SUBJECT HIM TO SUCH A SERIOUS EXPERIMENT ON SUCH SHORT NOTICE... WELL, I'M JUST AFRAID HE MIGHT NOT BE ABLE TO UNDERSTAND OR COPE WITH IT.
YOU'RE BEING OVERPROTECTIVE, SUE--JUST AS I'VE BEEN WITH YOU IN THE PAST. AND SINCE IT'S FRANKLIN WE'RE CONCERNED ABOUT--
--WHY DON'T WE JUST ASK HIM?
VERY WELL--BUT WE'LL GO ONLY IF IT DOESN'T SEEM TO UPSET HIM.
AGREED--AND JUST SO YOUR OBVIOUS CONCERN DOESN'T STACK THE DECK...
OH, REED!
FAIR'S FAIR, DARLING. HE'S ENTITLED TO MAKE HIS OWN DECISION.

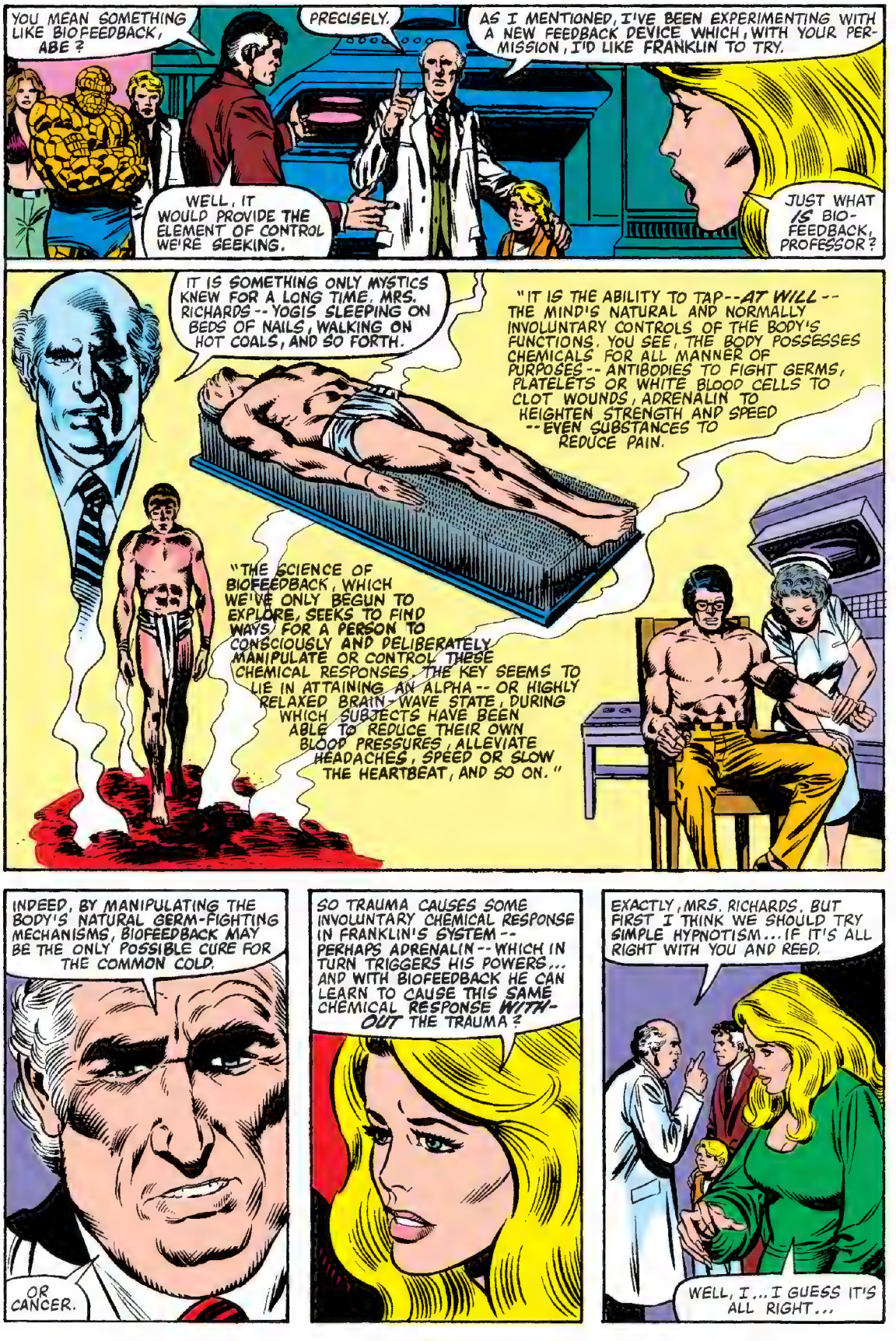

OH, ALL RIGHT--I'LL TURN INVISIBLE IF YOU REALLY THINK IT'S NECESSARY.
I DO, SO YOU'LL HAVE TO DO YOUR FRETTING OUT OF SIGHT.
FRANKLIN--? COME IN HERE FOR A MINUTE, WILL YOU, SON?
TA DAAA! HERE I AM, DADDY--COME AND GET ME!
YOU'VE GOT IT, TIGER!
WHEEE! THAT'S FUN DADDY! BUT WHAT DID YOU WANT ME FOR?
WELL, SON, REMEMBER HOW YOUR MOTHER AND I MENTIONED SOME TESTS TO--
SURE, DADDY--EXPER'MENTS TO FIND OUT ABOUT MY POWERS, RIGHT?
RIGHT WELL, AN OLD COLLEAGUE OF MINE MIGHT BE ABLE TO HELP.
DO YOU UNDERSTAND WHY WE THINK THE TESTS ARE NECESSARY?
YEP--CUZ MY POWERS HAVE NO CONTROL LIKE YOURS DO AN' WE GOTTA FIND A CONTROL FOR 'EM.
THEN YOU WOULDN'T MIND SEEING THIS DOCTOR FRIEND OF MINE?
HECK NO, DADDY--IT WON'T HURT. WHEN DO WE GO? NOW?
WELL, DARLING? I THINK THAT'S A SUFFICIENT ANSWER, DON'T YOU?
HUH--?! WHO'RE YOU TALKIN' TO, DADDY?
ALL RIGHT, PAPA REED, YOU WIN--BUT TALK ABOUT STACKING THE DECK...
MOMMY! YOU WERE INVIS'BLE--SPYIN' ON US THE WHOLE TIME!
IT WAS YOUR FATHER'S IDEA, DEAR--AND HE JUST BOUGHT YOU AN ADVENTURE WITH IT!

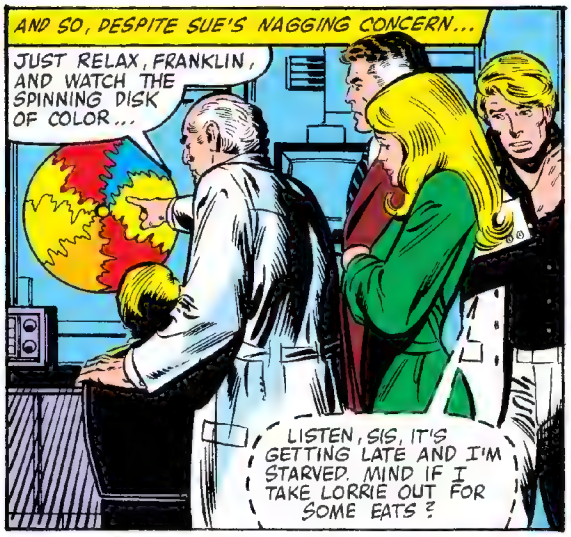

THE DOORBELL--THAT'S HER!
BING BONG
DON'T BUST YER GUT OVER IT, TORCHIE! I'LL GET IT--GIVE YA MORE TIME TA ARRANGE YER CURLY LOCKS!
HEY!
Y-YOU MUST BE... L-LORRIE!
AND YOU... YOU'RE THE THING! IT'S REALLY YOU... BUT I NEVER DREAMED YOU'D LOOK EVEN MORE ...MORE POWERFUL IN PERSON!
WELL, UH, YEAH -- I S'POSE YA COULD SAY I'M DEFINITELY ONE OF A KIND.
WAIT'LL I TELL MY FOLKS THAT I ACTUALLY MET YOU! DAD ALWAYS FOLLOWS THE NEWS STORIES ABOUT YOU -- HE THINKS YOU'RE... UM, FASCINATING.
DO YOU THINK I COULD HAVE YOUR AUTOGRAPH TO SHOW THEM? I'VE GOT A PEN AND PAPER IN HERE SOMEWHERE...
WHY, CERTAINLY, LITTLE LADY, GLAD TA OBLIGE ONE O' MY GENUINE FANS -- AS OPPOSED TA THEM LOUSY YANCY STREETERS, THAT IS.
AHEM.
NICE GIRL, MATCHSTICK. IF IT WUZN'T FER ALICIA, I MIGHT BE TEMPTED TA TAKE HER AWAY FROM YA.
JUST TRY IT, YA BIG LUG, AND I'LL SCORCH YOUR--
DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT -- BUT I STILL BET SHE WON'T LET YA KISS HER.
AHEM... LORRIE, YOU... YOU LOOK STUNNING.
WHY, THANK YOU FOR NOTICING, HANDSOME. I WAS JUST THINKING THE SAME THING ABOUT YOUR HEADQUARTERS --
--AND FEELING GLAD I SPENT THE TWO HOURS IT TOOK TO LOOK STUNNING FOR THE OCCASION.
HAW! I LIKE HER, TORCHIE!
I BET SHE COULDN'T PUT ON A PHONEY AIR IF SHE TRIED!
UH, LORRIE, IF YOU'RE READY TO LOOK AROUND NOW, WE'LL JUST--
HELLO, FOLKS!

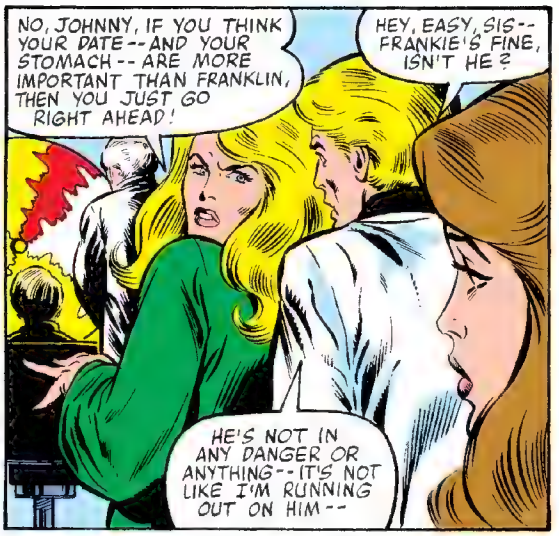

OH, HI, REED. LORRIE MELTON, THIS IS MY BROTHER-IN-LAW REED RICHARDS, ALSO KNOWN AS MR. FANTASTIC...
AND THAT'S HIS WIFE SUE, MY SISTER THE INVISIBLE GIRL...
AND THE LITTLE TYKE IS THEIR SON FRANKLIN.
HIYA, LORRIE! YOU'RE JOHNNY'S NEW GIRLFRIEND! WHEN ARE YA GETTIN' MARRIED LIKE MY MOM AN' DAD--?
UH, WE WERE JUST ON OUR WAY TO VISIT A FRIEND AT SEABOARD UNIVERSITY. CARE TO COME ALONG FOR THE RIDE?
SOUNDS TERRIFIC TO ME, MR. RICHARDS. I NEVER THOUGHT I WAS THE TYPE TO BE STARSTRUCK, BUT I SURE CAN'T IMAGINE PASSING UP A DAY WITH THE FANTASTIC FOUR.
OKAY, I GUESS WE'LL HAVE TO SKIP THE TOUR OF HEADQUARTERS, LORRIE, BUT AT LEAST YOU'LL GET TO SEE--
"--OUR HANGAR."
WOWWW... I'VE NEVER SEEN SO MANY FINE MACHINES IN ONE PLACE BEFORE--AND I'VE BEEN AROUND A LOT OF FINE MACHINES.
THAT'S RIGHT, LORRIE--JOHNNY SAID YOU MET AT THE RACE TRACK!
RIGHT--AND HANDSOME HERE WOULD'VE WON THAT DAY IF HE'D STAYED IN THE CAR LONG ENOUGH TO CROSS THE FINISH LINE.
I HAD TO FLAME RIGHT OUT OF THE CAR TO ANSWER THE FF SIGNAL FLARE, SIS.
THEN YOU LIKE CARS TOO, LORRIE?
I GREW UP WITH THEM, MRS. RICHARDS--MY FATHER WAS A RACE DRIVER TOO.
HE'S A PIT-BOSS NOW AND I WORK AS ONE OF THE MECHANICS IN HIS CREW.

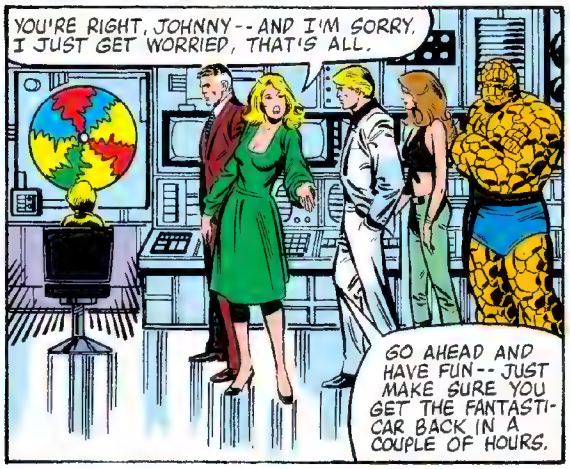

HERE WE ARE, FOLKS -- I THOUGHT WE'D TAKE THE FANTASTI-CAR.
WOW! WHAT CAN SHE DO CRANKED-UP, MR. RICHARDS?
REED, PLEASE. WE'VE NEVER CLOCKED THE F-CAR FULL-BORE, LORRIE, BUT I THINK IT'S SAFE TO SAY SHE'S STATE OF THE ART... AND THEN SOME.
I'LL BET! I CAN HARDLY WAIT TO RIDE IN HER...
THEN LET'S GO. AND WITH BEN PILOTING, YOU SHOULD BE IN FOR A TREAT!
GOODIE! I GET TO SIT ON LORRIE'S LAP!
LOOKS LIKE NEPHEW'S HORNIN' IN ON OLD UNCLE'S ACTION.
AND SO--
I REPEAT-- WOW!
THIS IS FABULOUS, MR. GRIMM!
AW, JUST CALL ME BASHFUL BENJIE, BABE.
--A HALF-HOUR LATER...
THERE IT IS--ABE'S LAB IS ON THE NORTH QUADRANGLE, BEN.
GOTCHA, STRETCH-- FASTEN YER SEAT-BELTS, CREW, FER A PERFECT FOUR-POINT LANDIN'.
SOON, AMID THE AWED REACTIONS OF PASSING STUDENTS.
REED! OVER HERE, REED!
IT'S SO GOOD TO SEE YOU AGAIN AFTER ALL THESE YEARS!
AND THIS MUST BE LITTLE FRANKLIN!
HIYA!
HI, ABE -- REMEMBER ME TOO?
I, UH, I HAD PREPARED MY-SELF TO SEE YOU AGAIN, OF COURSE, BEN, BUT YOUR APPEARANCE IS... STILL RATHER STARTLING...
IT'S ME ALL RIGHT, ABE. REMEMBER THAT PICTURE OF THE TWO OF US BY THE FOUN-TAIN IN THE SENIOR YEARBOOK...?
...THE ONE WITH THE CAPTION, "BRAINS AN' BRAWN"? WELL, LET'S JUST SAY WE'VE BOTH COME A LOT CLOSER TA RESEMBLIN' OUR NICKNAMES.
WHAPP
OOPH!

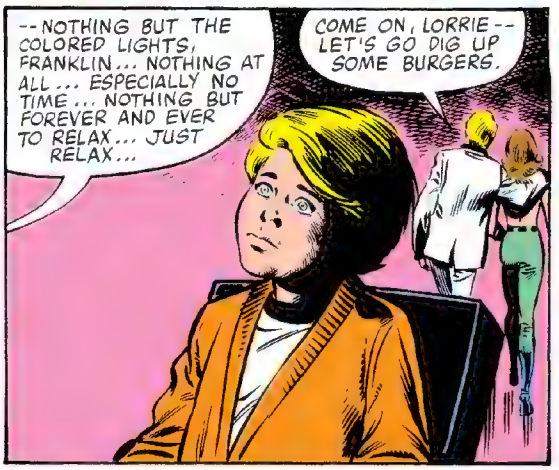

AS I RECALL, BEN, YOU NEARLY BROKE MY BACK TELLING A JOKE AT THE FOUNTAIN TOO -- SO, APPEARANCES TO THE CONTRARY, PERHAPS YOU HAVEN'T CHANGED SO MUCH AFTER ALL.
COME ON, I'LL SHOW YOU MY--
"-- LAB."
I'VE ALREADY STUDIED MY FILE ON FRANKLIN, COMPILED FROM OUR PHONE CONVERSATIONS, REED, AND THERE'S NO DOUBT IN MY MIND THAT HIS POWERS ORIGINATE IN HIS MIND. BUT THAT'S HARDLY SURPRISING--
--SINCE EVERYTHING WE DO OR EXPERIENCE ORIGINATES IN THE MIND.
WOTTA SET-UP, HUH, FRANKIE ?
AT ANY RATE, I THOUGHT WE'D START WITH SOME BASIC J.B. RHINE E.S.P. TESTS, DEVELOPED AT DUKE UNIVERSITY -- SIMPLE CARD-GUESSING... UNLESS ONE POSSESSES DEMONSTRABLE ESP, IN WHICH CASE IT BECOMES CARD-GLEANING.
GEE.
WE'LL USE YOUR MOTHER ON THE THEORY THAT THE PSYCHIC BOND, IF IT EXISTS --
--MIGHT BE STRONGER BETWEEN THE TWO OF YOU.
ALL RIGHT, FRANKLIN, THIS IS NUMBER ONE. JUST MARK DOWN WHATEVER CARD YOU THINK YOUR MOTHER IS CONCENTRATING ON.
OKAY, DOCTOR ABE, IT'S MARKED -- READY FOR NUMBER TWO.
1
2
AND AT THE END OF THE TEST...
NOTHING BEYOND THE LAWS OF CHANCE, STATISTICALLY SPEAKING.
BUT IF HIS POWERS COME AND GO, AS IT WERE, PERHAPS HE'D SCORE HIGHER AT A TIME WHEN HIS POWERS WERE IN EFFECT.
WHICH SEEMS TO BE MOMENTS OF TRAUMA AND STRESS -- WHICH WE DON'T WANT TO INDUCE SIMPLY FOR A TEST.
OF COURSE NOT, REED.
YET, IF TRAUMA, THROUGH A SUDDEN RELEASE OF ADRENALIN OR SOME OTHER CHEMICAL IN HIS SYSTEM, DOES INDEED TRIGGER HIS POWERS... THERE MAY BE A WAY TO INITIATE THAT CHEMICAL RELEASE WITHOUT TRAUMA.

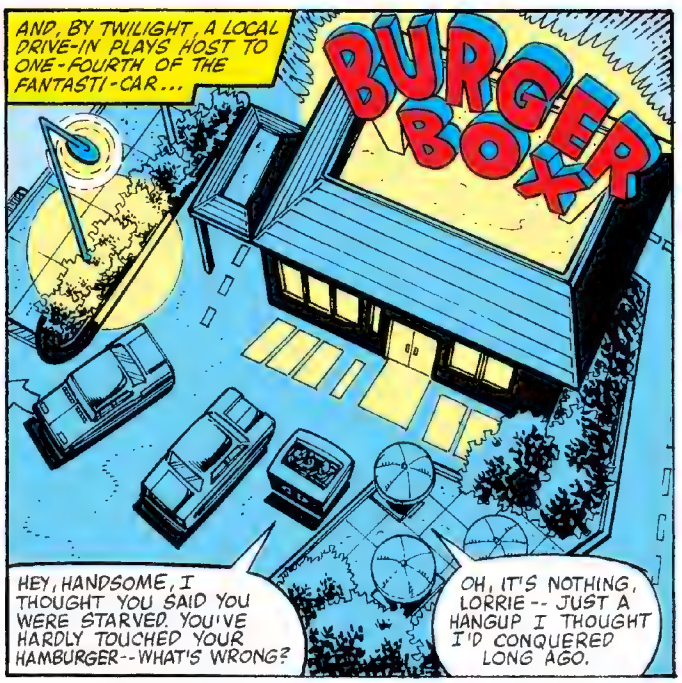

YOU MEAN SOMETHING LIKE BIOFEEDBACK, ABE?
PRECISELY.
AS I MENTIONED, I'VE BEEN EXPERIMENTING WITH A NEW FEEDBACK DEVICE WHICH, WITH YOUR PERMISSION, I'D LIKE FRANKLIN TO TRY.
WELL, IT WOULD PROVIDE THE ELEMENT OF CONTROL WE'RE SEEKING.
JUST WHAT IS BIOFEEDBACK, PROFESSOR?
IT IS SOMETHING ONLY MYSTICS KNEW FOR A LONG TIME, MRS. RICHARDS -- YOGIS SLEEPING ON BEDS OF NAILS, WALKING ON HOT COALS, AND SO FORTH.
"IT IS THE ABILITY TO TAP--AT WILL--THE MIND'S NATURAL AND NORMALLY INVOLUNTARY CONTROLS OF THE BODY'S FUNCTIONS. YOU SEE, THE BODY POSSESSES CHEMICALS FOR ALL MANNER OF PURPOSES -- ANTIBODIES TO FIGHT GERMS, PLATELETS OR WHITE BLOOD CELLS TO CLOT WOUNDS, ADRENALIN TO HEIGHTEN STRENGTH AND SPEED -- EVEN SUBSTANCES TO REDUCE PAIN.
"THE SCIENCE OF BIOFEEDBACK, WHICH WE'VE ONLY BEGUN TO EXPLORE, SEEKS TO FIND WAYS FOR A PERSON TO CONSCIOUSLY AND DELIBERATELY MANIPULATE OR CONTROL THESE CHEMICAL RESPONSES. THE KEY SEEMS TO LIE IN ATTAINING AN ALPHA -- OR HIGHLY RELAXED BRAIN-WAVE STATE, DURING WHICH SUBJECTS HAVE BEEN ABLE TO REDUCE THEIR OWN BLOOD PRESSURES, ALLEVIATE HEADACHES, SPEED OR SLOW THE HEARTBEAT, AND SO ON."
INDEED, BY MANIPULATING THE BODY'S NATURAL GERM-FIGHTING MECHANISMS, BIOFEEDBACK MAY BE THE ONLY POSSIBLE CURE FOR THE COMMON COLD.
OR CANCER.
SO TRAUMA CAUSES SOME INVOLUNTARY CHEMICAL RESPONSE IN FRANKLIN'S SYSTEM -- PERHAPS ADRENALIN -- WHICH IN TURN TRIGGERS HIS POWERS... AND WITH BIOFEEDBACK HE CAN LEARN TO CAUSE THIS SAME CHEMICAL RESPONSE WITHOUT THE TRAUMA?
EXACTLY, MRS. RICHARDS. BUT FIRST I THINK WE SHOULD TRY SIMPLE HYPNOTISM... IF IT'S ALL RIGHT WITH YOU AND REED.
WELL, I... I GUESS IT'S ALL RIGHT...


AND SO, DESPITE SUE'S NAGGING CONCERN...
JUST RELAX, FRANKLIN, AND WATCH THE SPINNING DISK OF COLOR...
LISTEN, SIS, IT'S GETTING LATE AND I'M STARVED. MIND IF I TAKE LORRIE OUT FOR SOME EATS?


NO, JOHNNY, IF YOU THINK YOUR DATE--AND YOUR STOMACH--ARE MORE IMPORTANT THAN FRANKLIN, THEN YOU JUST GO RIGHT AHEAD!
HEY, EASY, SIS--FRANKIE'S FINE, ISN'T HE?
HE'S NOT IN ANY DANGER OR ANYTHING--IT'S NOT LIKE I'M RUNNING OUT ON HIM--

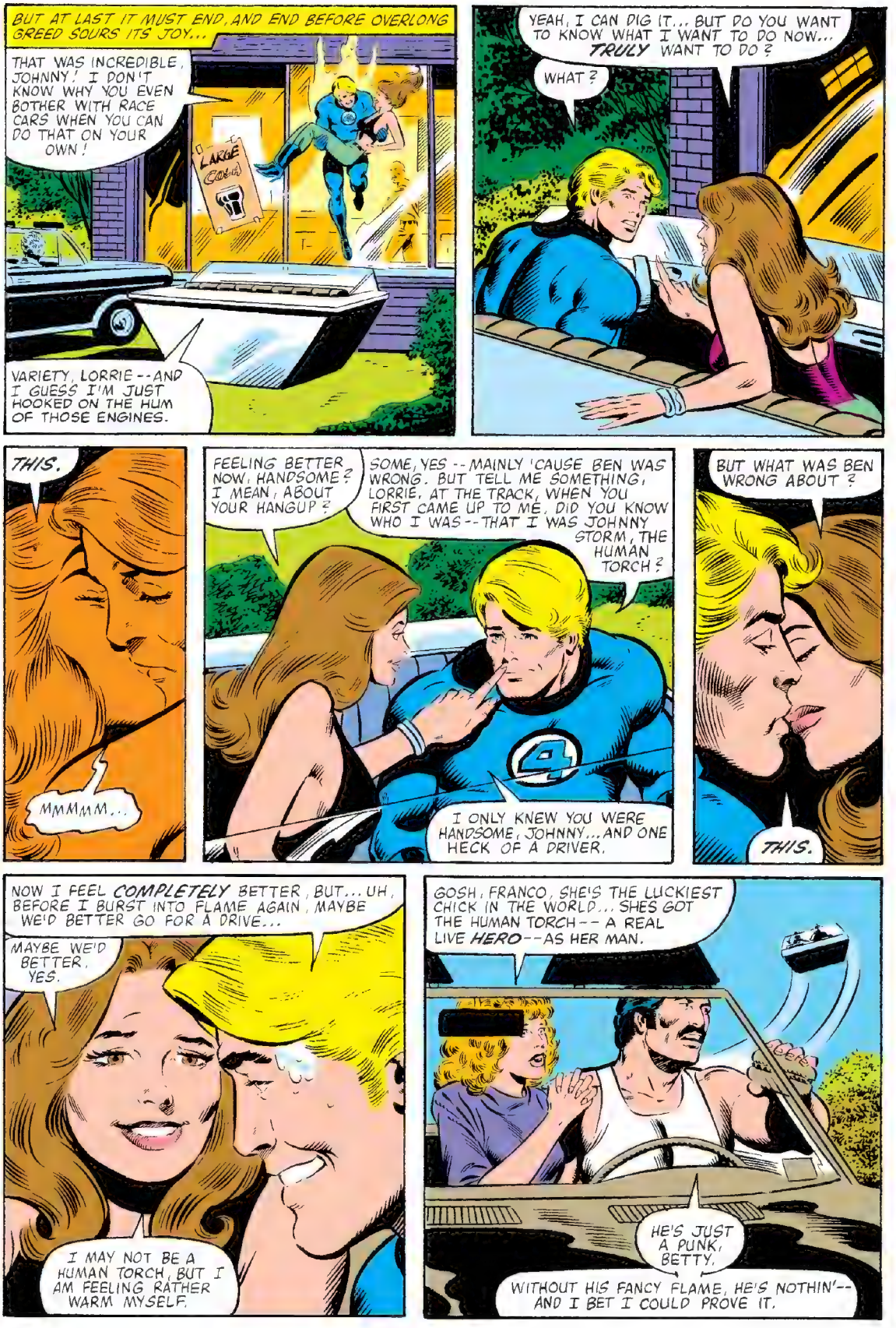

YOU'RE RIGHT, JOHNNY--AND I'M SORRY. I JUST GET WORRIED, THAT'S ALL.
GO AHEAD AND HAVE FUN--JUST MAKE SURE YOU GET THE FANTASTI-CAR BACK IN A COUPLE OF HOURS.

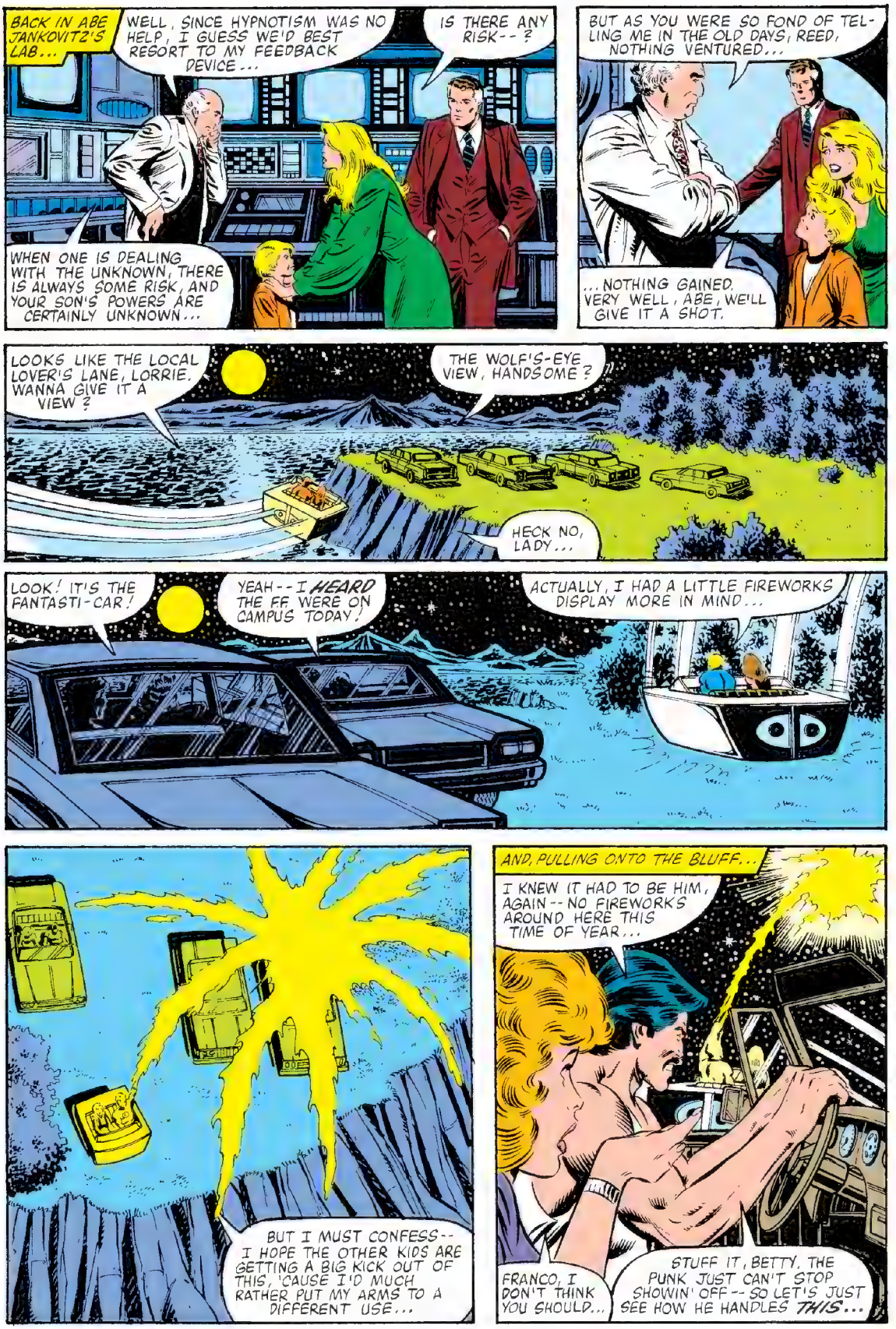

--NOTHING BUT THE COLORED LIGHTS, FRANKLIN... NOTHING AT ALL... ESPECIALLY NO TIME... NOTHING BUT FOREVER AND EVER TO RELAX... JUST RELAX...
COME ON, LORRIE--LET'S GO DIG UP SOME BURGERS.


AND, BY TWILIGHT, A LOCAL DRIVE-IN PLAYS HOST TO ONE-FOURTH OF THE FANTASTI-CAR...
BURGER BOX
HEY, HANDSOME, I THOUGHT YOU SAID YOU WERE STARVED. YOU'VE HARDLY TOUCHED YOUR HAMBURGER--WHAT'S WRONG?
OH, IT'S NOTHING, LORRIE--JUST A HANGUP I THOUGHT I'D CONQUERED LONG AGO.

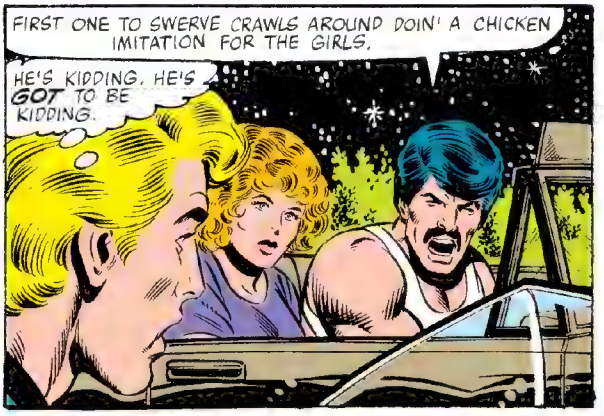
WHAT KIND OF HANGUP?
I GUESS BEING THE YOUNGEST MEMBER OF THE TEAM--THE LOOSE, UNSETTLED ONE--MAYBE THE LEAST RESPONSIBLE ONE. IT WAS JUST THAT LITTLE TIFF I HAD WITH SUE, BUT IT'S OKAY NOW.
BUT HE KNOWS THE WORDS ARE HOLLOW, AND WITHOUT CONVICTION...

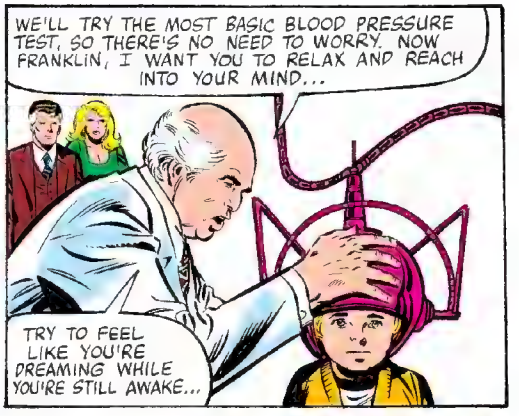
TIME THEN, TO BRIGHTEN...
SAY, WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO DO NOW?
YOU MEAN WHAT WOULD I MOST LIKE TO DO-- TRULY LIKE TO DO?
WELL... UH... YEAH.
GOOD. THEN I'D LIKE TO FLY, JOHNNY-- I'D LIKE TO SOAR THROUGH THE WIND AND OVER THE TREES-- WITH-OUT THE F-CAR.
YOU MEAN...?
YEP. I MEAN.
THEN YOU GOT IT, LADY...
FLAME ON!!
HOLY SMOKES! IT IS THE HUMAN TORCH, FRANCO-- JUST LIKE I SAID IT WAS!
BUT WHO'S THAT LUCKY GIRL WITH HIM--?!
WHO? A GIRL IN SHEER ECSTASY.
WOW, AGAIN, HANDSOME! THIS IS BETTER THAN TAKING A TRACK CURVE AT ONE-TWENTY!
AND FROM BREATHLESS EXHILARATION--
--UP THROUGH THE GLOWING CLOUDS THEY SWOOP AND SOAR, INTO A ROMANTIC SCENE OF MOON AND STARS AND DARK, DARK SKY...
IT'S GORGEOUS, JOHNNY-- THE MOST INTENSE EXPERIENCE I'VE EVER FELT!
SIGHT AND SENSATION, ALL A WONDER, ENOUGH TO MAKE ONE WEEP AND LAUGH AND SHOUT, TOGETHER FROM BUBBLING HEART AND BOUNDLESS SPIRIT...


BUT AT LAST IT MUST END, AND END BEFORE OVERLONG GREED SOURS ITS JOY...
THAT WAS INCREDIBLE, JOHNNY! I DON'T KNOW WHY YOU EVEN BOTHER WITH RACE CARS WHEN YOU CAN DO THAT ON YOUR OWN!
LARGE
VARIETY, LORRIE--AND I GUESS I'M JUST HOOKED ON THE HUM OF THOSE ENGINES.
YEAH, I CAN DIG IT... BUT DO YOU WANT TO KNOW WHAT I WANT TO DO NOW... TRULY WANT TO DO?
WHAT?
THIS.
MMMMM...
FEELING BETTER NOW, HANDSOME? I MEAN, ABOUT YOUR HANGUP?
SOME, YES--MAINLY 'CAUSE BEN WAS WRONG. BUT TELL ME SOMETHING, LORRIE, AT THE TRACK, WHEN YOU FIRST CAME UP TO ME, DID YOU KNOW WHO I WAS--THAT I WAS JOHNNY STORM, THE HUMAN TORCH?
I ONLY KNEW YOU WERE HANDSOME, JOHNNY... AND ONE HECK OF A DRIVER.
BUT WHAT WAS BEN WRONG ABOUT?
THIS.
NOW I FEEL COMPLETELY BETTER, BUT... UH, BEFORE I BURST INTO FLAME AGAIN, MAYBE WE'D BETTER GO FOR A DRIVE...
MAYBE WE'D BETTER, YES.
I MAY NOT BE A HUMAN TORCH, BUT I AM FEELING RATHER WARM MYSELF.
GOSH, FRANCO, SHE'S THE LUCKIEST CHICK IN THE WORLD... SHE'S GOT THE HUMAN TORCH--A REAL LIVE HERO--AS HER MAN.
HE'S JUST A PUNK, BETTY.
WITHOUT HIS FANCY FLAME, HE'S NOTHIN'--AND I BET I COULD PROVE IT.


BACK IN ABE JANKOVITZ'S LAB...
WELL, SINCE HYPNOTISM WAS NO HELP, I GUESS WE'D BEST RESORT TO MY FEEDBACK DEVICE...
IS THERE ANY RISK--?
WHEN ONE IS DEALING WITH THE UNKNOWN, THERE IS ALWAYS SOME RISK, AND YOUR SON'S POWERS ARE CERTAINLY UNKNOWN...
BUT AS YOU WERE SO FOND OF TELLING ME IN THE OLD DAYS, REED, NOTHING VENTURED...
...NOTHING GAINED. VERY WELL, ABE, WE'LL GIVE IT A SHOT.
LOOKS LIKE THE LOCAL LOVER'S LANE, LORRIE. WANNA GIVE IT A VIEW?
THE WOLF'S-EYE VIEW, HANDSOME?
HECK NO, LADY...
LOOK! IT'S THE FANTASTI-CAR!
YEAH--I HEARD THE FF WERE ON CAMPUS TODAY!
ACTUALLY, I HAD A LITTLE FIREWORKS DISPLAY MORE IN MIND...
BUT I MUST CONFESS-- I HOPE THE OTHER KIDS ARE GETTING A BIG KICK OUT OF THIS, 'CAUSE I'D MUCH RATHER PUT MY ARMS TO A DIFFERENT USE...
AND, PULLING ONTO THE BLUFF...
I KNEW IT HAD TO BE HIM, AGAIN--NO FIREWORKS AROUND HERE THIS TIME OF YEAR...
FRANCO, I DON'T THINK YOU SHOULD...
STUFF IT, BETTY. THE PUNK JUST CAN'T STOP SHOWIN' OFF--SO LET'S JUST SEE HOW HE HANDLES THIS...

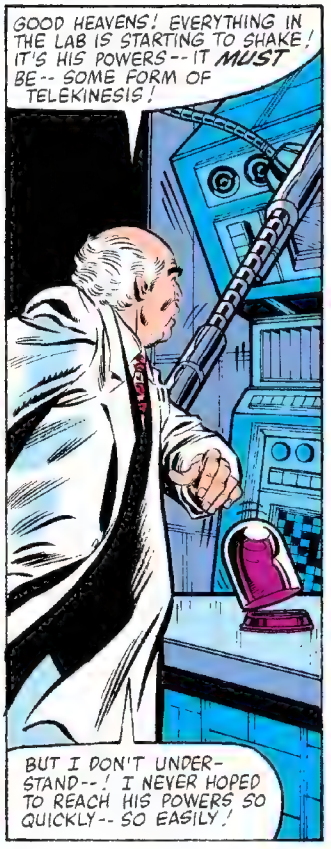
SKREEEC!!!
OH, BROTHER
BERARDI
HEY, HOTSHOT, YOU'RE REAL GOOD WITH SPARKLERS, BUT HOW'S YOUR NERVE IN A GAME OF CHICKEN -- JUST YOU AN' ME AN' OUR MACHINES GOIN' AT EACH OTHER HEAD TO HEAD.


FIRST ONE TO SWERVE CRAWLS AROUND DOIN' A CHICKEN IMITATION FOR THE GIRLS.
HE'S KIDDING. HE'S *GOT* TO BE KIDDING.

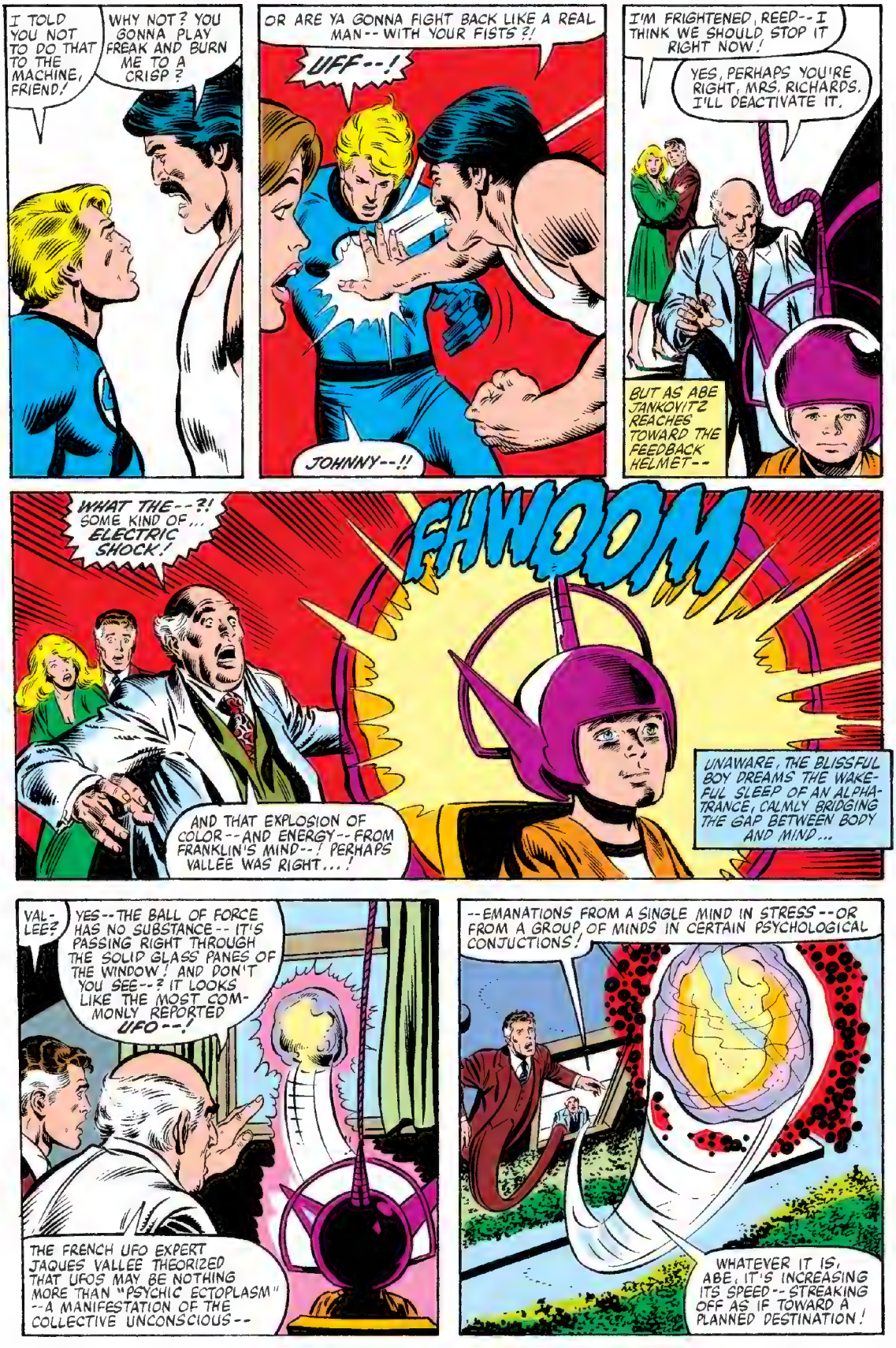

WE'LL TRY THE MOST BASIC BLOOD PRESSURE TEST, SO THERE'S NO NEED TO WORRY. NOW FRANKLIN, I WANT YOU TO RELAX AND REACH INTO YOUR MIND...
TRY TO FEEL LIKE YOU'RE DREAMING WHILE YOU'RE STILL AWAKE...

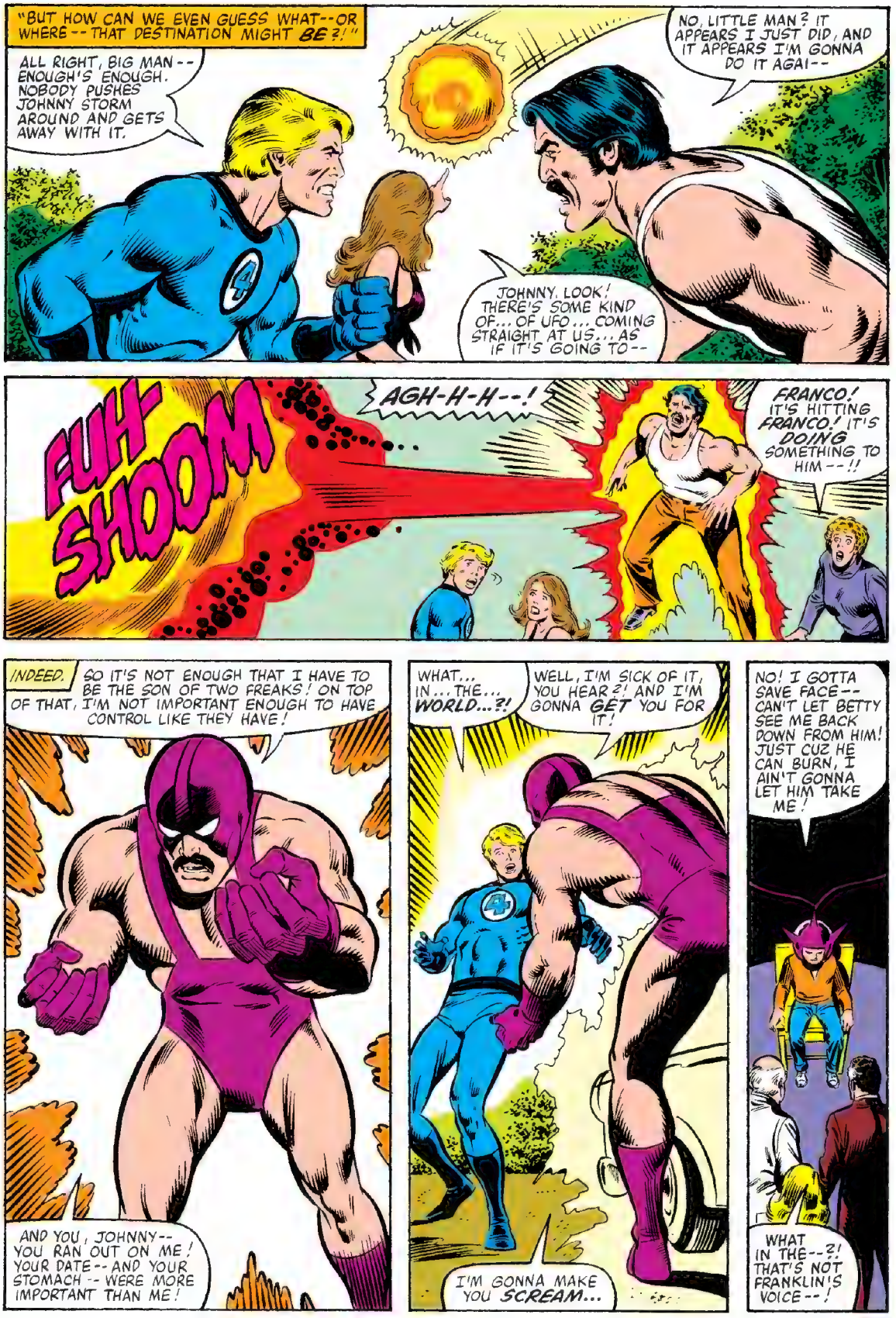
LOOK, FRIEND, I'VE GOT NO BEEF WITH YOU. THIS IS 1980, REMEMBER? IT'S NOT 1950 AND I'M NOT JAMES DEAN, SO IF YOU WANT TO PLAY TOUGH-GUY REBEL--
--WHY DON'T YOU JUST FIND YOURSELF A GOOD CAUSE FOR A CHANGE?
WHY, YOU...

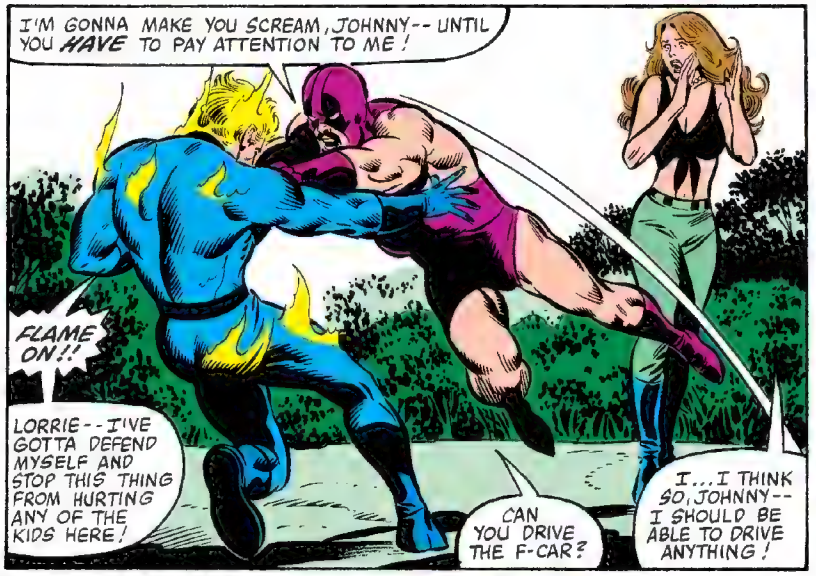
IT'S WORKING! HE'S ACHIEVED THE ALPHA BRAIN-WAVE STATE AND--


GOOD HEAVENS! EVERYTHING IN THE LAB IS STARTING TO SHAKE! IT'S HIS POWERS -- IT *MUST* BE -- SOME FORM OF TELEKINESIS!
BUT I DON'T UNDERSTAND--! I NEVER HOPED TO REACH HIS POWERS SO QUICKLY -- SO EASILY!

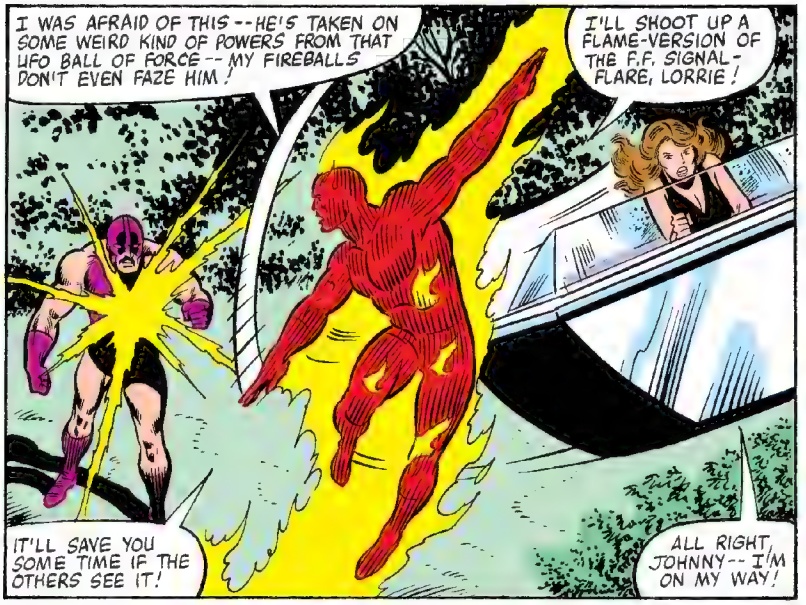
I TOLD YOU TO LAY OFF, BIG MAN!
WHY DON'T YOU MAKE ME, HOTSHOT?
PUT ANOTHER DENT IN THE F-CAR AND I *WILL!*
TONK
NO, JOHNNY! LET'S JUST LEAVE -- PLEASE?


I TOLD YOU NOT TO DO THAT TO THE MACHINE, FRIEND!
WHY NOT? YOU GONNA PLAY FREAK AND BURN ME TO A CRISP?
OR ARE YA GONNA FIGHT BACK LIKE A REAL MAN -- WITH YOUR FISTS?!
UFF--!
JOHNNY--!!
I'M FRIGHTENED, REED -- I THINK WE SHOULD STOP IT RIGHT NOW!
YES, PERHAPS YOU'RE RIGHT, MRS. RICHARDS. I'LL DEACTIVATE IT.
BUT AS ABE JANKOVITZ REACHES TOWARD THE FEEDBACK HELMET --
WHAT THE--?! SOME KIND OF... ELECTRIC SHOCK!
FHWOOM
AND THAT EXPLOSION OF COLOR -- AND ENERGY -- FROM FRANKLIN'S MIND--! PERHAPS VALLEE WAS RIGHT....!
UNAWARE, THE BLISSFUL BOY DREAMS THE WAKEFUL SLEEP OF AN ALPHA-TRANCE, CALMLY BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN BODY AND MIND...
VALLEE?
YES -- THE BALL OF FORCE HAS NO SUBSTANCE -- IT'S PASSING RIGHT THROUGH THE SOLID GLASS PANES OF THE WINDOW! AND DON'T YOU SEE--? IT LOOKS LIKE THE MOST COMMONLY REPORTED UFO--!
THE FRENCH UFO EXPERT JAQUES VALLEE THEORIZED THAT UFOS MAY BE NOTHING MORE THAN "PSYCHIC ECTOPLASM" -- A MANIFESTATION OF THE COLLECTIVE UNCONSCIOUS --
--EMANATIONS FROM A SINGLE MIND IN STRESS -- OR FROM A GROUP OF MINDS IN CERTAIN PSYCHOLOGICAL CONJUCTIONS!
WHATEVER IT IS, ABE, IT'S INCREASING ITS SPEED -- STREAKING OFF AS IF TOWARD A PLANNED DESTINATION!


"BUT HOW CAN WE EVEN GUESS WHAT--OR WHERE--THAT DESTINATION MIGHT BE?!"
ALL RIGHT, BIG MAN--ENOUGH'S ENOUGH. NOBODY PUSHES JOHNNY STORM AROUND AND GETS AWAY WITH IT.
NO, LITTLE MAN? IT APPEARS I JUST DID, AND IT APPEARS I'M GONNA DO IT AGAI--
JOHNNY, LOOK! THERE'S SOME KIND OF... OF UFO... COMING STRAIGHT AT US... AS IF IT'S GOING TO--
FUH-SHOOM
AGH-H-H--!
FRANCO! IT'S HITTING FRANCO! IT'S DOING SOMETHING TO HIM--!!
INDEED.
SO IT'S NOT ENOUGH THAT I HAVE TO BE THE SON OF TWO FREAKS! ON TOP OF THAT, I'M NOT IMPORTANT ENOUGH TO HAVE CONTROL LIKE THEY HAVE!
AND YOU, JOHNNY--YOU RAN OUT ON ME! YOUR DATE--AND YOUR STOMACH--WERE MORE IMPORTANT THAN ME!
WHAT... IN... THE... WORLD...?!
WELL, I'M SICK OF IT, YOU HEAR?! AND I'M GONNA GET YOU FOR IT!
I'M GONNA MAKE YOU SCREAM...
NO! I GOTTA SAVE FACE--CAN'T LET BETTY SEE ME BACK DOWN FROM HIM! JUST CUZ HE CAN BURN, I AIN'T GONNA LET HIM TAKE ME!
WHAT IN THE--?! THAT'S NOT FRANKLIN'S VOICE--!


I'M GONNA MAKE YOU SCREAM, JOHNNY -- UNTIL YOU *HAVE* TO PAY ATTENTION TO ME!
FLAME ON!!
LORRIE -- I'VE GOTTA DEFEND MYSELF AND STOP THIS THING FROM HURTING ANY OF THE KIDS HERE!
CAN YOU DRIVE THE F-CAR?
I... I THINK SO, JOHNNY -- I SHOULD BE ABLE TO DRIVE ANYTHING!

WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO DO -- ?!
GO GET THE OTHERS -- IN CASE THIS GUY IS TOO MUCH FOR ME!

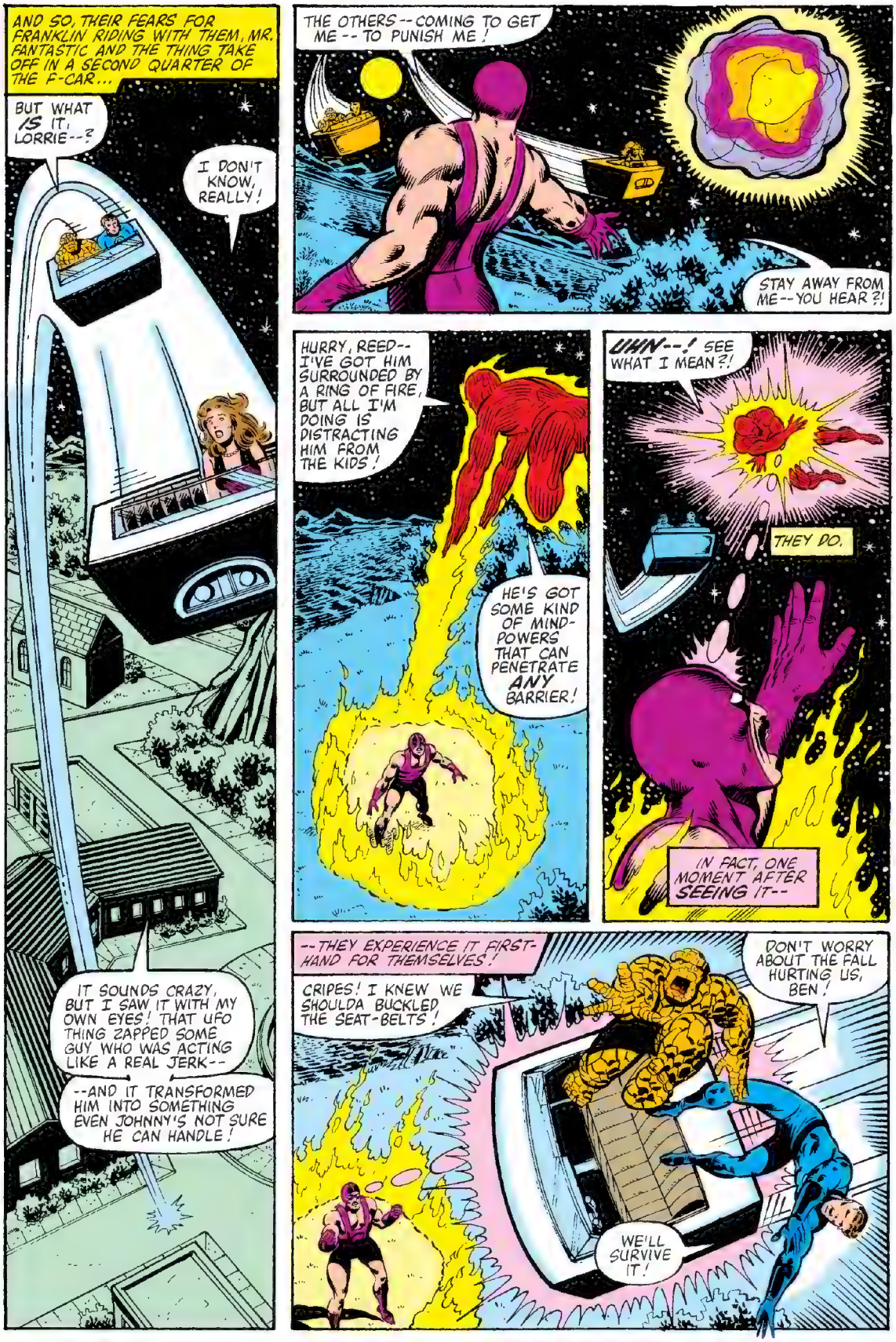

I WAS AFRAID OF THIS -- HE'S TAKEN ON SOME WEIRD KIND OF POWERS FROM THAT UFO BALL OF FORCE -- MY FIREBALLS DON'T EVEN FAZE HIM!
I'LL SHOOT UP A FLAME-VERSION OF THE F.F. SIGNAL-FLARE, LORRIE!
IT'LL SAVE YOU SOME TIME IF THE OTHERS SEE IT!
ALL RIGHT, JOHNNY -- I'M ON MY WAY!

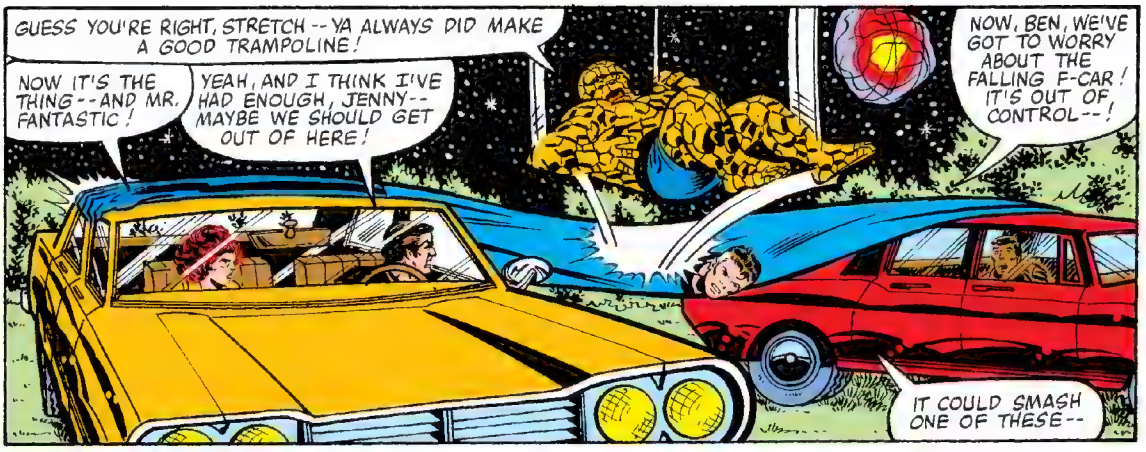
AND HANG IN THERE, HANDSOME -- PLEASE! I DON'T WANT TO LOSE YOU NOW --
-- NOT WHEN WE'VE JUST FOUND EACH OTHER!

YOU'RE RIGHT, ABE -- THERE'S SOME KIND OF ELECTRIC SHOCK AS SOON AS WE TRY TO GET NEAR HIM! WE CAN'T SHUT OFF THE MACHINE!

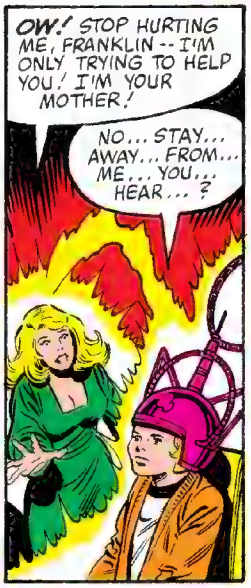
HEY, STRETCH -- TORCHIE'S IN TROUBLE! AND HERE COMES LORRIE IN PART OF THE F-CAR!
THEN IT MUST HAVE SOMETHING TO DO WITH THAT "UFO" FROM FRANKLIN'S MIND, BEN! WE'VE GOT TO CHECK IT OUT -- BUT HOW CAN WE LEAVE FRANKLIN *NOW* -- ?

HE'S OUT OF CONTROL, REED, BUT NOT IN PAIN! I CAN STAY WITH HIM -- SOONER OR LATER HE'S GOT TO TIRE ENOUGH FOR ME TO REACH THE MACHINE...
GO, DARLING!
JOHNNY MAY BE IN DANGER! I'LL STAY HERE WITH PROFESSOR JANKOVITZ!


AND SO, THEIR FEARS FOR FRANKLIN RIDING WITH THEM, MR. FANTASTIC AND THE THING TAKE OFF IN A SECOND QUARTER OF THE F-CAR...
BUT WHAT IS IT, LORRIE--?
I DON'T KNOW, REALLY!
IT SOUNDS CRAZY, BUT I SAW IT WITH MY OWN EYES! THAT UFO THING ZAPPED SOME GUY WHO WAS ACTING LIKE A REAL JERK--
--AND IT TRANSFORMED HIM INTO SOMETHING EVEN JOHNNY'S NOT SURE HE CAN HANDLE!
THE OTHERS--COMING TO GET ME--TO PUNISH ME!
STAY AWAY FROM ME--YOU HEAR?!
HURRY, REED--I'VE GOT HIM SURROUNDED BY A RING OF FIRE, BUT ALL I'M DOING IS DISTRACTING HIM FROM THE KIDS!
HE'S GOT SOME KIND OF MIND-POWERS THAT CAN PENETRATE ANY BARRIER!
UHN--! SEE WHAT I MEAN?!
THEY DO.
IN FACT, ONE MOMENT AFTER SEEING IT--
--THEY EXPERIENCE IT FIRST-HAND FOR THEMSELVES!
CRIPES! I KNEW WE SHOULDA BUCKLED THE SEAT-BELTS!
DON'T WORRY ABOUT THE FALL HURTING US, BEN!
WE'LL SURVIVE IT!

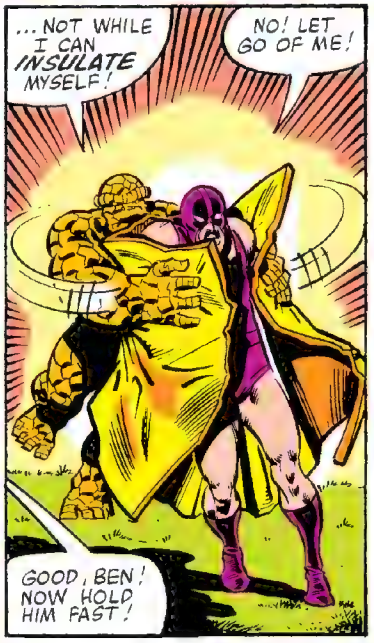

GUESS YOU'RE RIGHT, STRETCH -- YA ALWAYS DID MAKE A GOOD TRAMPOLINE!
NOW IT'S THE THING -- AND MR. FANTASTIC!
YEAH, AND I THINK I'VE HAD ENOUGH, JENNY -- MAYBE WE SHOULD GET OUT OF HERE!
NOW, BEN, WE'VE GOT TO WORRY ABOUT THE FALLING F-CAR! IT'S OUT OF CONTROL --!
IT COULD SMASH ONE OF THESE --

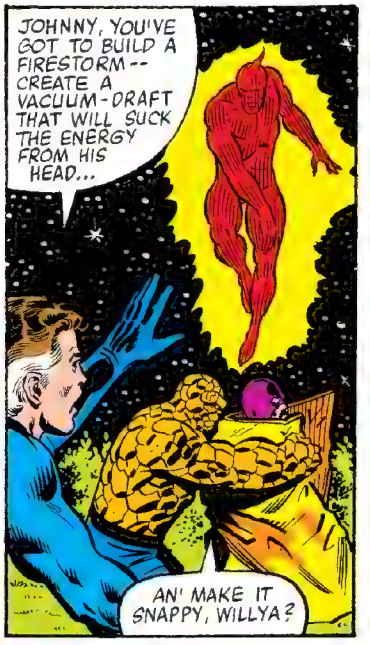
NO SWEAT, STRETCH! JUST MAKE BELIEVE I'M WILLY MAYS ROBBIN' A HOME RUN...
WHICH BRINGS US BACK TA SQUARE ONE -- WHERE IS THIS CREEP?

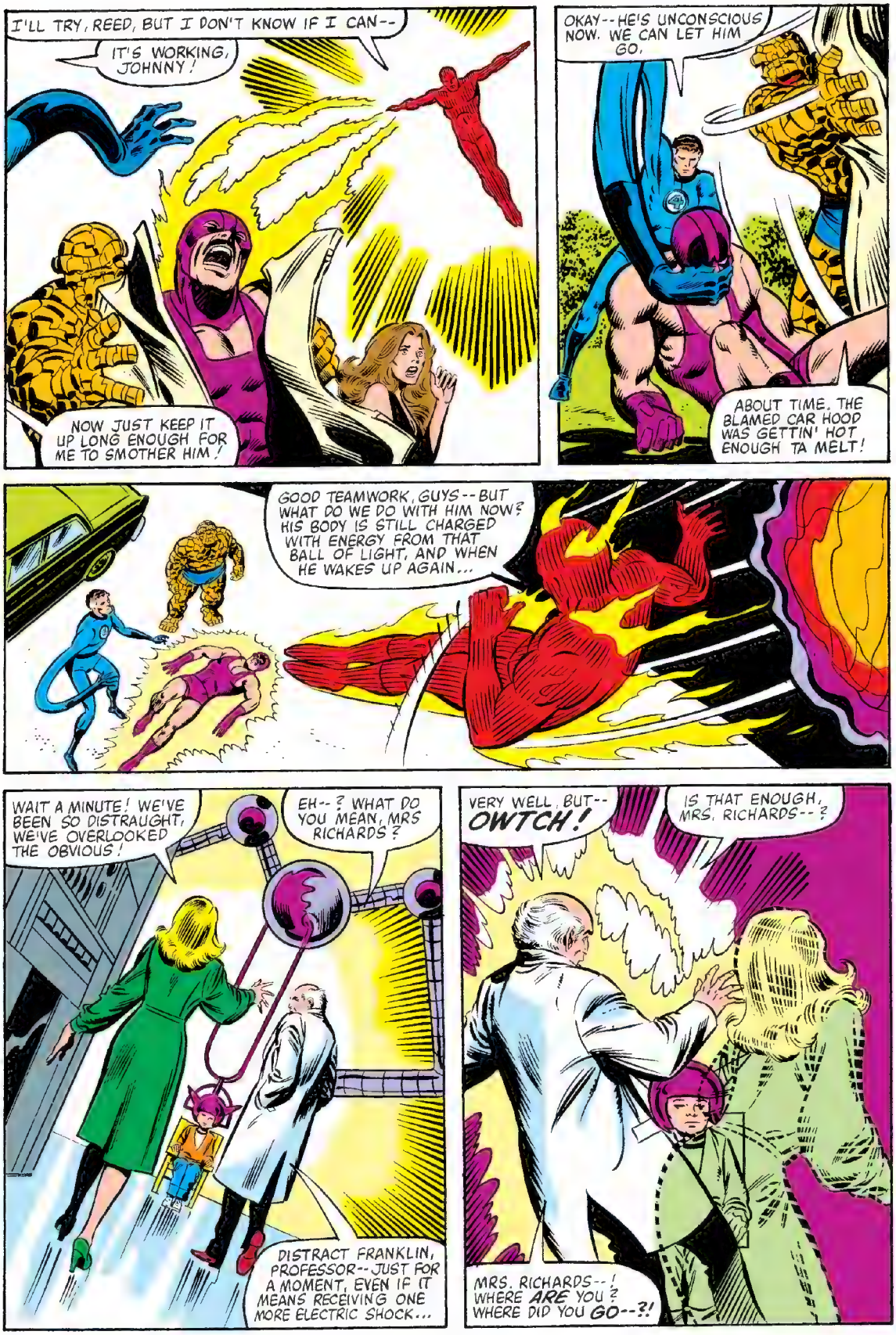

OW! STOP HURTING ME, FRANKLIN -- I'M ONLY TRYING TO HELP YOU! I'M YOUR MOTHER!
NO... STAY... AWAY... FROM... ME... YOU... HEAR... ?

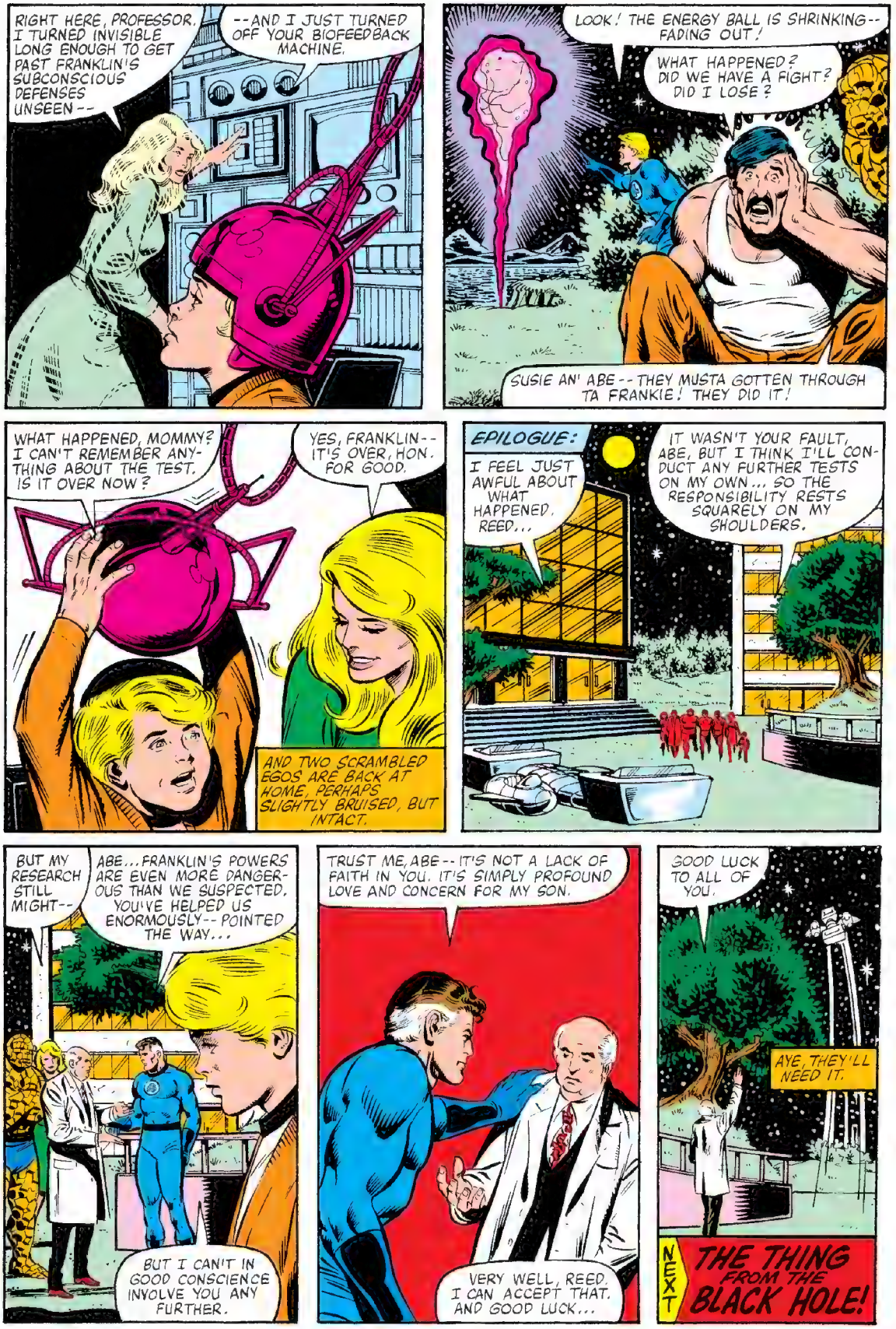
HOLD IT, REED -- HE'S JUST A NORMAL GUY, SOME BULLY WHO WAS THROWING HIS WEIGHT AROUND WHEN THE LIGHT ZAPPED HIM. WHY IT PICKED HIM, I DON'T KNOW...
THE LIGHT IS FROM FRANKLIN'S MIND, JOHNNY -- !
PERHAPS IT WAS ATTRACTED BY THE BULLY'S EGO --

-- BY THE STRONGEST PSYCHIC EMANATIONS -- BUT IF HE'S JUST A KID, WE CAN'T HURT HIM! BEN, YOUR SKIN'S THE TOUGHEST -- THINK YOU CAN GRAB HIM WITHOUT HURTING YOURSELF?
MEBBE -- BUT I AIN'T ABOUT TO CHANCE IT...
SKRUNCH!


... NOT WHILE I CAN INSULATE MYSELF!
NO! LET GO OF ME!
GOOD, BEN! NOW HOLD HIM FAST!


JOHNNY, YOU'VE GOT TO BUILD A FIRESTORM -- CREATE A VACUUM-DRAFT THAT WILL SUCK THE ENERGY FROM HIS HEAD...
AN' MAKE IT SNAPPY, WILLYA?


I'LL TRY, REED, BUT I DON'T KNOW IF I CAN--
IT'S WORKING, JOHNNY!
NOW JUST KEEP IT UP LONG ENOUGH FOR ME TO SMOTHER HIM!
OKAY--HE'S UNCONSCIOUS NOW. WE CAN LET HIM GO.
ABOUT TIME. THE BLAMED CAR HOOD WAS GETTIN' HOT ENOUGH TA MELT!
GOOD TEAMWORK, GUYS--BUT WHAT DO WE DO WITH HIM NOW? HIS BODY IS STILL CHARGED WITH ENERGY FROM THAT BALL OF LIGHT, AND WHEN HE WAKES UP AGAIN...
WAIT A MINUTE! WE'VE BEEN SO DISTRAUGHT, WE'VE OVERLOOKED THE OBVIOUS!
EH--? WHAT DO YOU MEAN, MRS RICHARDS?
DISTRACT FRANKLIN, PROFESSOR--JUST FOR A MOMENT, EVEN IF IT MEANS RECEIVING ONE MORE ELECTRIC SHOCK...
VERY WELL, BUT--
OWTCH!
IS THAT ENOUGH, MRS. RICHARDS--?
MRS. RICHARDS--! WHERE ARE YOU? WHERE DID YOU GO--?!


RIGHT HERE, PROFESSOR. I TURNED INVISIBLE LONG ENOUGH TO GET PAST FRANKLIN'S SUBCONSCIOUS DEFENSES UNSEEN--
--AND I JUST TURNED OFF YOUR BIOFEEDBACK MACHINE.
LOOK! THE ENERGY BALL IS SHRINKING--FADING OUT!
WHAT HAPPENED? DID WE HAVE A FIGHT? DID I LOSE?
SUSIE AN' ABE--THEY MUSTA GOTTEN THROUGH TA FRANKIE! THEY DID IT!
WHAT HAPPENED, MOMMY? I CAN'T REMEMBER ANYTHING ABOUT THE TEST. IS IT OVER NOW?
YES, FRANKLIN--IT'S OVER, HON. FOR GOOD.
AND TWO SCRAMBLED EGOS ARE BACK AT HOME, PERHAPS SLIGHTLY BRUISED, BUT INTACT.
EPILOGUE:
I FEEL JUST AWFUL ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED, REED...
IT WASN'T YOUR FAULT, ABE, BUT I THINK I'LL CONDUCT ANY FURTHER TESTS ON MY OWN... SO THE RESPONSIBILITY RESTS SQUARELY ON MY SHOULDERS.
BUT MY RESEARCH STILL MIGHT--
ABE... FRANKLIN'S POWERS ARE EVEN MORE DANGEROUS THAN WE SUSPECTED. YOU'VE HELPED US ENORMOUSLY--POINTED THE WAY...
BUT I CAN'T IN GOOD CONSCIENCE INVOLVE YOU ANY FURTHER.
TRUST ME, ABE--IT'S NOT A LACK OF FAITH IN YOU. IT'S SIMPLY PROFOUND LOVE AND CONCERN FOR MY SON.
VERY WELL, REED. I CAN ACCEPT THAT. AND GOOD LUCK...
GOOD LUCK TO ALL OF YOU.
AYE, THEY'LL NEED IT.
NEXT
THE THING FROM THE BLACK HOLE!

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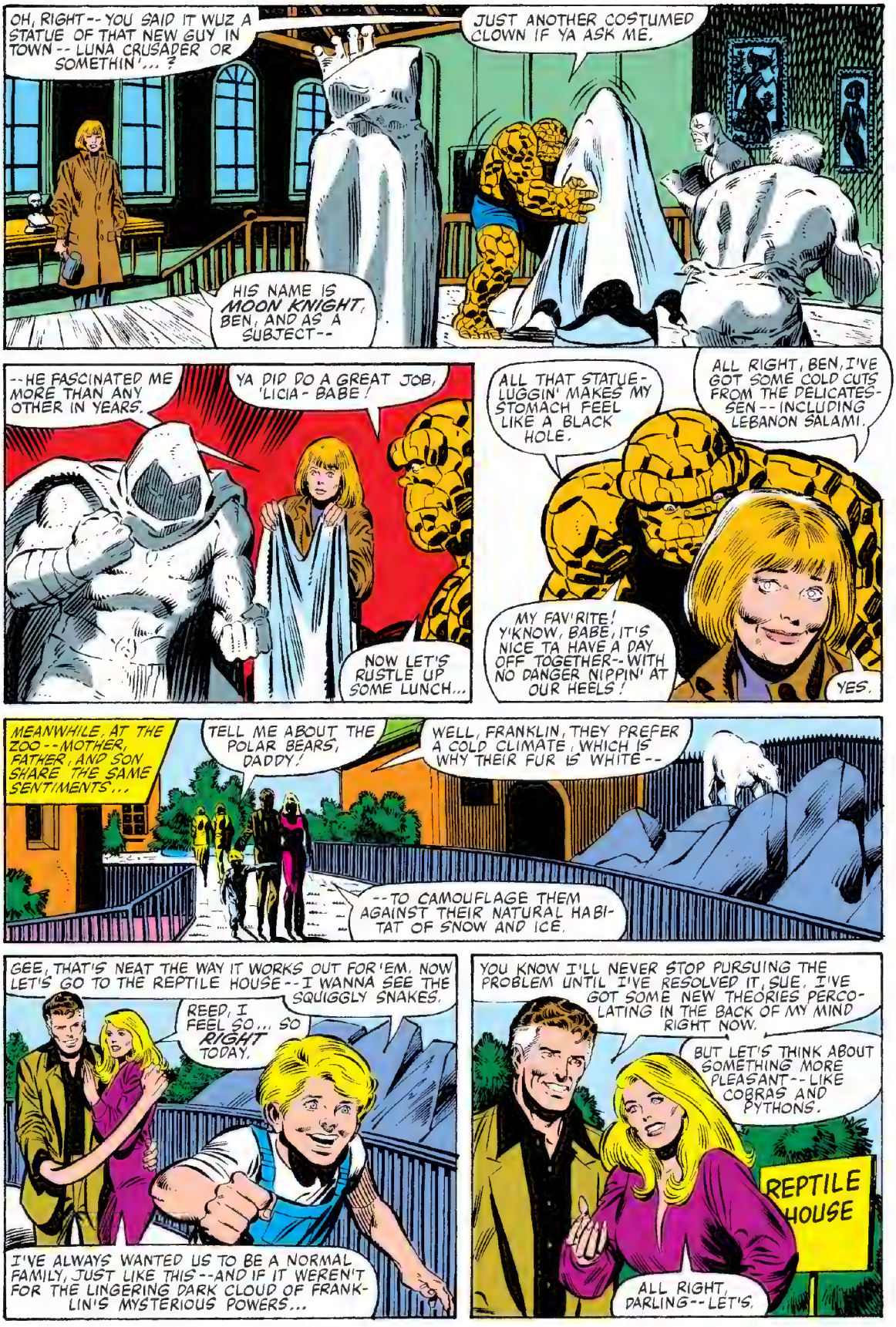
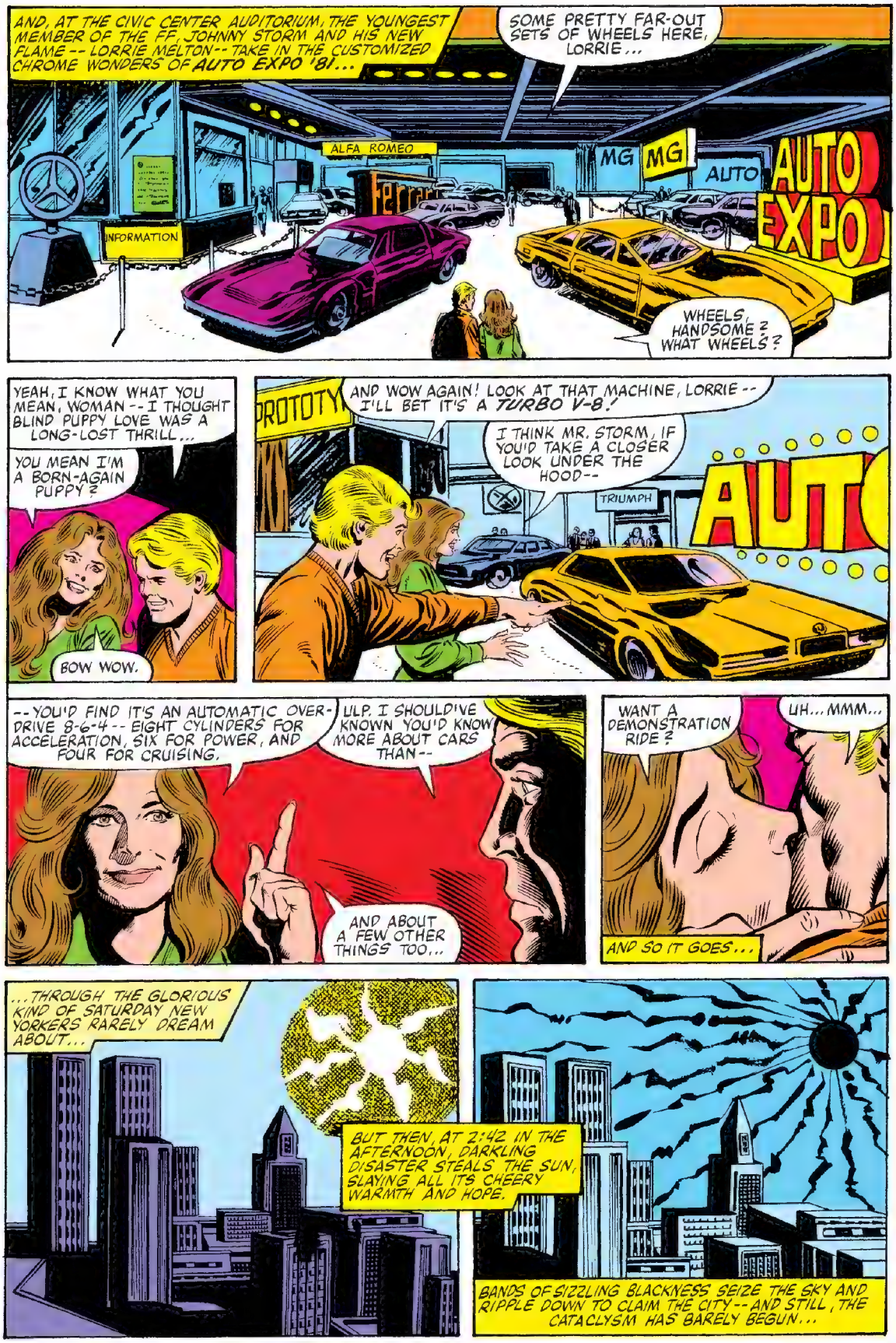
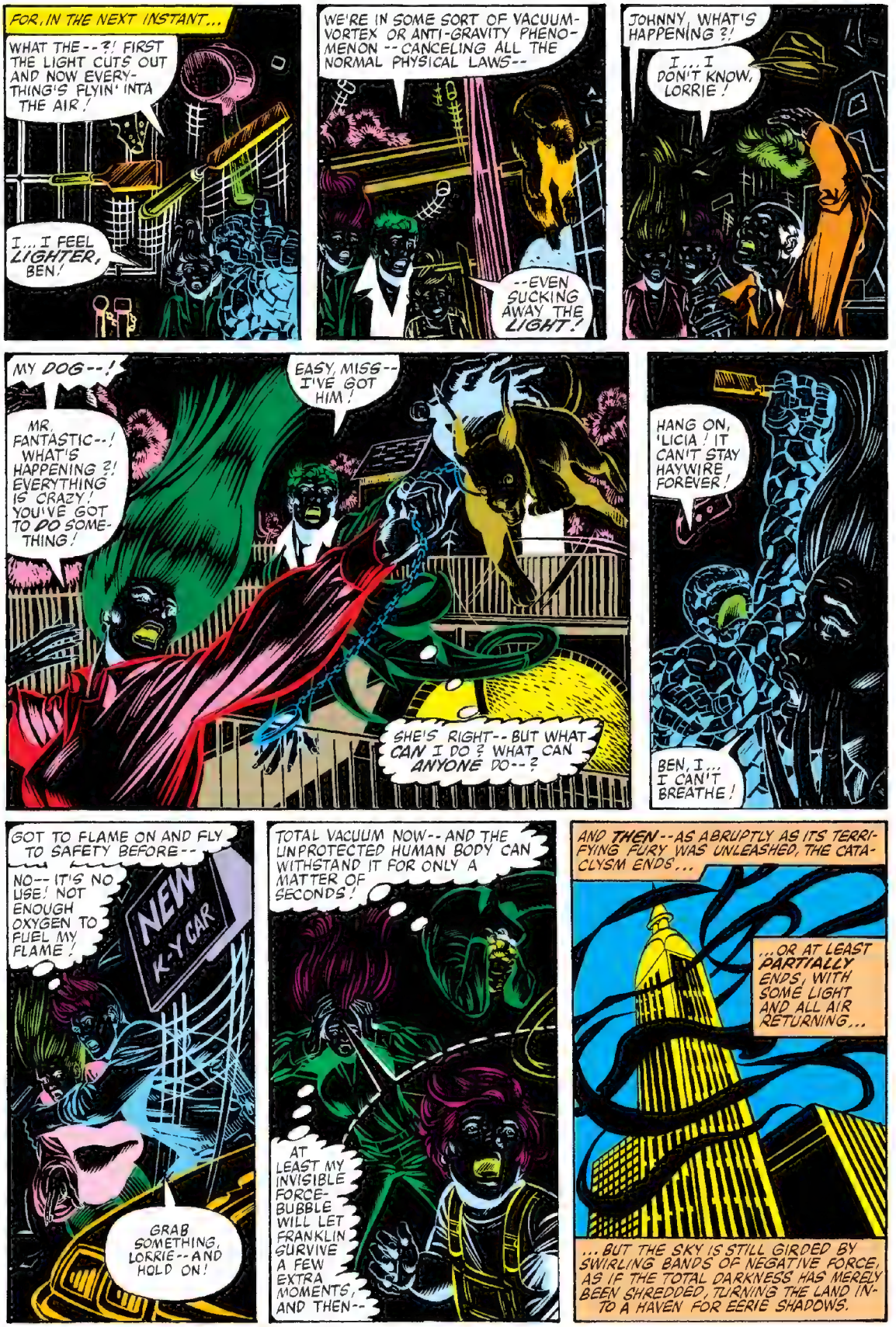
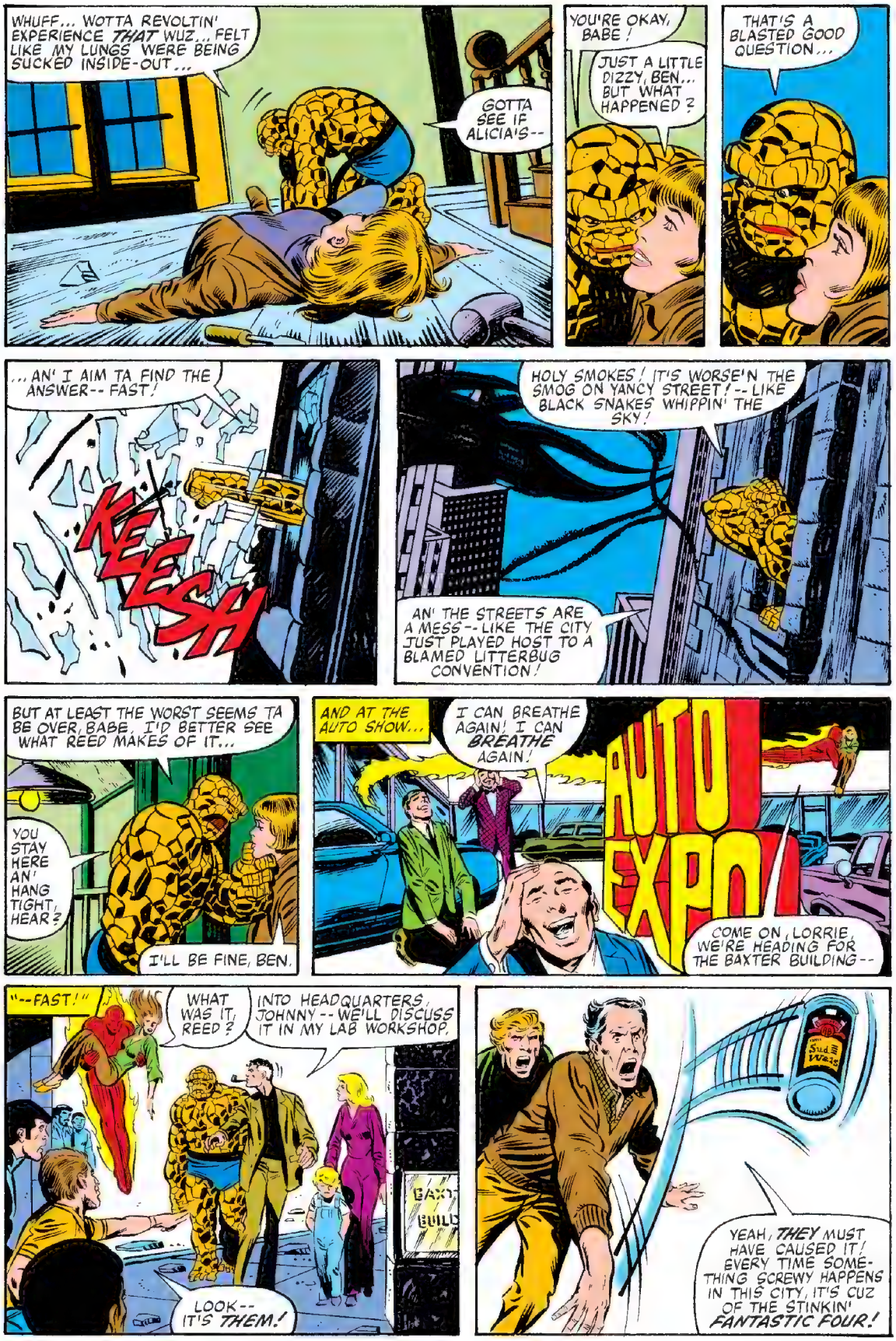
Fantastic Four
THE WORLD'S GREATEST COMIC MAGAZINE!
BEWARE THE SEEKER OF DARKNESS-- FOR HE SHALL DESTROY US ALL!
SEAN/SINN

Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE FANTASTIC FOUR!®
THE THING FROM THE BLACK HOLE
IT'S SATURDAY AFTERNOON AT ALICIA MASTER'S MANHATTEN ART STUDIO, AND BOYFRIEND BEN GRIMM IS PUT TO WORK...
THANK YOU, BEN--IF YOU'LL JUST SET IT OVER IN THE DISPLAY AREA WITH THE OTHER STATUES.
YOU GOT IT, ALICIA. AFTER LUGGIN' REED'S CONTRAPTIONS AROUND ALL THE TIME, THIS THING FEELS LIKE A FEATHER! WHAT IS IT ANYWAY?
MY LATEST WORK, BEN--JUST COMPLETED THIS MORNING. I WANT TO SHOW IT TO YOU...
CAPTAIN AMERICA
HULK
SHOOTER
SHEESH!
AND THE BLIND SCULPTRESS SMILES.
HEY JIM, HOW DO YOU LIKE OUR LITTLE TRIBUTE TO YA?
I'LL GET YOU FOR THIS!
DOUG MOENCH WRITER / BILL SIENKIEWICZ LAYOUTS / JOE SINNOTT FINISHES / JIM NOVAK LETTERER / GEORGE ROUSSOS COLORIST / JIM SALICRUP EDITOR / JIM SHOOTER ED-IN-CHIEF

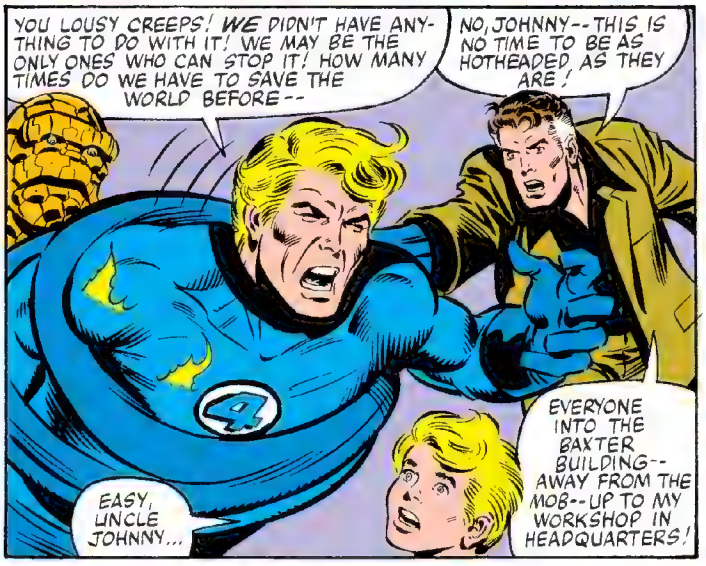

OH, RIGHT--YOU SAID IT WUZ A STATUE OF THAT NEW GUY IN TOWN--LUNA CRUSADER OR SOMETHIN'...?
JUST ANOTHER COSTUMED CLOWN IF YA ASK ME.
HIS NAME IS MOON KNIGHT, BEN, AND AS A SUBJECT--
--HE FASCINATED ME MORE THAN ANY OTHER IN YEARS.
YA DID DO A GREAT JOB, 'LICIA-BABE!
NOW LET'S RUSTLE UP SOME LUNCH...
ALL THAT STATUE-LUGGIN' MAKES MY STOMACH FEEL LIKE A BLACK HOLE.
ALL RIGHT, BEN, I'VE GOT SOME COLD CUTS FROM THE DELICATESSEN--INCLUDING LEBANON SALAMI.
MY FAV'RITE! Y'KNOW, BABE, IT'S NICE TA HAVE A DAY OFF TOGETHER--WITH NO DANGER NIPPIN' AT OUR HEELS!
YES.
MEANWHILE, AT THE ZOO--MOTHER, FATHER, AND SON SHARE THE SAME SENTIMENTS...
TELL ME ABOUT THE POLAR BEARS, DADDY!
WELL, FRANKLIN, THEY PREFER A COLD CLIMATE, WHICH IS WHY THEIR FUR IS WHITE--
--TO CAMOUFLAGE THEM AGAINST THEIR NATURAL HABITAT OF SNOW AND ICE.
GEE, THAT'S NEAT THE WAY IT WORKS OUT FOR 'EM. NOW LET'S GO TO THE REPTILE HOUSE--I WANNA SEE THE SQUIGGLY SNAKES.
REED, I FEEL SO... SO RIGHT TODAY.
I'VE ALWAYS WANTED US TO BE A NORMAL FAMILY, JUST LIKE THIS--AND IF IT WEREN'T FOR THE LINGERING DARK CLOUD OF FRANKLIN'S MYSTERIOUS POWERS...
YOU KNOW I'LL NEVER STOP PURSUING THE PROBLEM UNTIL I'VE RESOLVED IT, SUE. I'VE GOT SOME NEW THEORIES PERCOLATING IN THE BACK OF MY MIND RIGHT NOW.
BUT LET'S THINK ABOUT SOMETHING MORE PLEASANT--LIKE COBRAS AND PYTHONS.
REPTILE HOUSE
ALL RIGHT, DARLING--LET'S.


AND, AT THE CIVIC CENTER AUDITORIUM, THE YOUNGEST MEMBER OF THE FF, JOHNNY STORM AND HIS NEW FLAME -- LORRIE MELTON -- TAKE IN THE CUSTOMIZED CHROME WONDERS OF AUTO EXPO '81...
SOME PRETTY FAR-OUT SETS OF WHEELS HERE, LORRIE...
ALFA ROMEO
MG
MG
AUTO
AUTO EXPO
INFORMATION
WHEELS, HANDSOME? WHAT WHEELS?
YEAH, I KNOW WHAT YOU MEAN, WOMAN -- I THOUGHT BLIND PUPPY LOVE WAS A LONG-LOST THRILL...
YOU MEAN I'M A BORN-AGAIN PUPPY?
BOW WOW.
AND WOW AGAIN! LOOK AT THAT MACHINE, LORRIE -- I'LL BET IT'S A TURBO V-8!
I THINK MR. STORM, IF YOU'D TAKE A CLOSER LOOK UNDER THE HOOD--
TRIUMPH
AUTO
--YOU'D FIND IT'S AN AUTOMATIC OVER-DRIVE 8-6-4 -- EIGHT CYLINDERS FOR ACCELERATION, SIX FOR POWER, AND FOUR FOR CRUISING.
ULP. I SHOULD'VE KNOWN YOU'D KNOW MORE ABOUT CARS THAN--
AND ABOUT A FEW OTHER THINGS TOO...
WANT A DEMONSTRATION RIDE?
UH... MMM...
AND SO IT GOES...
...THROUGH THE GLORIOUS KIND OF SATURDAY NEW YORKERS RARELY DREAM ABOUT...
BUT THEN, AT 2:42 IN THE AFTERNOON, DARKLING DISASTER STEALS THE SUN, SLAYING ALL ITS CHEERY WARMTH AND HOPE.
BANDS OF SIZZLING BLACKNESS SEIZE THE SKY AND RIPPLE DOWN TO CLAIM THE CITY -- AND STILL, THE CATACLYSM HAS BARELY BEGUN...

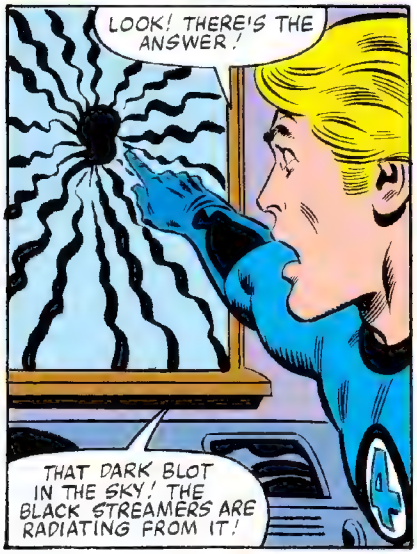

FOR, IN THE NEXT INSTANT...
WHAT THE--?! FIRST THE LIGHT CUTS OUT AND NOW EVERYTHING'S FLYIN' INTA THE AIR!
I... I FEEL LIGHTER, BEN!
WE'RE IN SOME SORT OF VACUUM-VORTEX OR ANTI-GRAVITY PHENOMENON--CANCELING ALL THE NORMAL PHYSICAL LAWS--
--EVEN SUCKING AWAY THE LIGHT!
JOHNNY, WHAT'S HAPPENING?!
I... I DON'T KNOW, LORRIE!
MY DOG--!
MR. FANTASTIC--! WHAT'S HAPPENING?! EVERYTHING IS CRAZY! YOU'VE GOT TO DO SOMETHING!
EASY, MISS--I'VE GOT HIM!
SHE'S RIGHT--BUT WHAT CAN I DO? WHAT CAN ANYONE DO--?
HANG ON, 'LICIA! IT CAN'T STAY HAYWIRE FOREVER!
BEN, I... I CAN'T BREATHE!
GOT TO FLAME ON AND FLY TO SAFETY BEFORE--
NO--IT'S NO USE! NOT ENOUGH OXYGEN TO FUEL MY FLAME!
NEW K-Y CAR
GRAB SOMETHING, LORRIE--AND HOLD ON!
TOTAL VACUUM NOW--AND THE UNPROTECTED HUMAN BODY CAN WITHSTAND IT FOR ONLY A MATTER OF SECONDS!
AT LEAST MY INVISIBLE FORCE-BUBBLE WILL LET FRANKLIN SURVIVE A FEW EXTRA MOMENTS, AND THEN--
AND THEN--AS ABRUPTLY AS ITS TERRIFYING FURY WAS UNLEASHED, THE CATACLYSM ENDS...
...OR AT LEAST PARTIALLY ENDS, WITH SOME LIGHT AND ALL AIR RETURNING...
...BUT THE SKY IS STILL GIRDED BY SWIRLING BANDS OF NEGATIVE FORCE, AS IF THE TOTAL DARKNESS HAS MERELY BEEN SHREDDED, TURNING THE LAND INTO A HAVEN FOR EERIE SHADOWS.

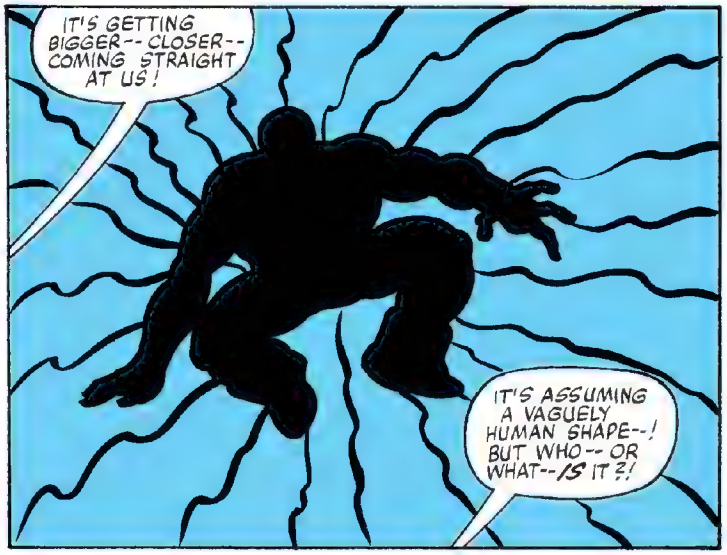

WHUFF... WOTTA REVOLTIN' EXPERIENCE THAT WUZ... FELT LIKE MY LUNGS WERE BEING SUCKED INSIDE-OUT...
GOTTA SEE IF ALICIA'S--
YOU'RE OKAY, BABE!
JUST A LITTLE DIZZY, BEN... BUT WHAT HAPPENED?
THAT'S A BLASTED GOOD QUESTION...
...AN' I AIM TA FIND THE ANSWER-- FAST!
KEEESH
HOLY SMOKES! IT'S WORSE'N THE SMOG ON YANCY STREET!-- LIKE BLACK SNAKES WHIPPIN' THE SKY!
AN' THE STREETS ARE A MESS-- LIKE THE CITY JUST PLAYED HOST TO A BLAMED LITTERBUG CONVENTION!
BUT AT LEAST THE WORST SEEMS TA BE OVER, BABE, I'D BETTER SEE WHAT REED MAKES OF IT...
YOU STAY HERE AN' HANG TIGHT, HEAR?
I'LL BE FINE, BEN.
AND AT THE AUTO SHOW...
I CAN BREATHE AGAIN! I CAN BREATHE AGAIN!
AUTO EXPO
COME ON, LORRIE, WE'RE HEADING FOR THE BAXTER BUILDING--
"--FAST!"
WHAT WAS IT, REED?
INTO HEADQUARTERS, JOHNNY-- WE'LL DISCUSS IT IN MY LAB WORKSHOP.
LOOK-- IT'S THEM!
YEAH, THEY MUST HAVE CAUSED IT! EVERY TIME SOMETHING SCREWY HAPPENS IN THIS CITY, IT'S CUZ OF THE STINKIN' FANTASTIC FOUR!

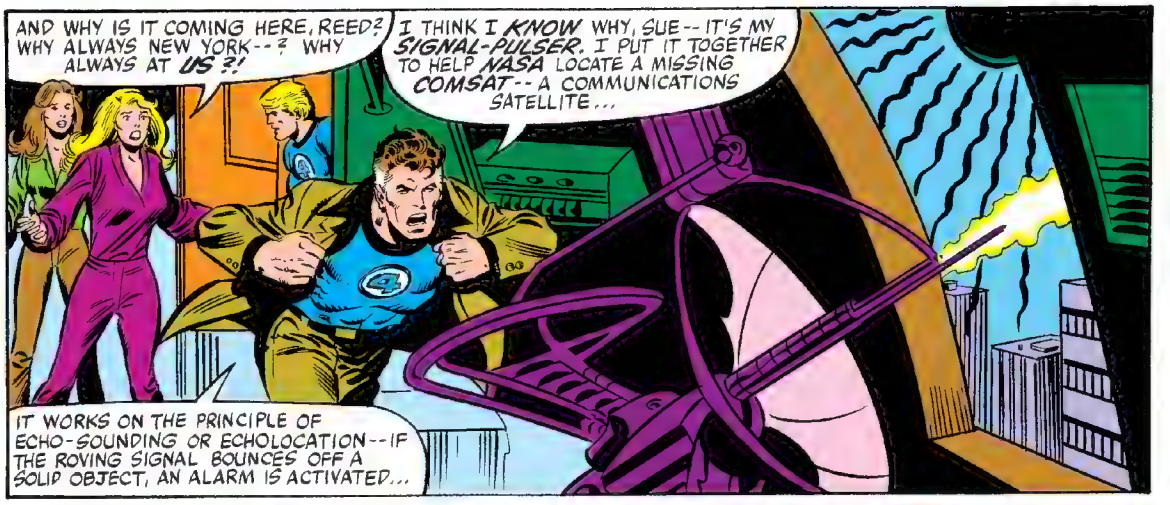
WELL WE AIN'T TAKIN' IT ANYMORE! LET'S GET RID OF 'EM ONCE AND FOR ALL!
THEY'VE GONE BERSERK, REED--EXPLODING IN A SPONTANEOUS RIOT!
JUST MAINTAIN YOUR INVISIBLE FORCE-SHIELD, SUE! PROTECT US UNTIL WE--

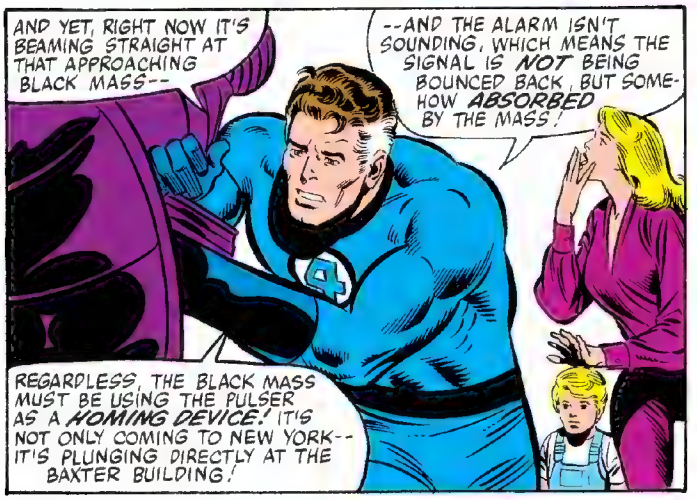

YOU LOUSY CREEPS! WE DIDN'T HAVE ANYTHING TO DO WITH IT! WE MAY BE THE ONLY ONES WHO CAN STOP IT! HOW MANY TIMES DO WE HAVE TO SAVE THE WORLD BEFORE--
NO, JOHNNY--THIS IS NO TIME TO BE AS HOTHEADED AS THEY ARE!
EASY, UNCLE JOHNNY...
EVERYONE INTO THE BAXTER BUILDING--AWAY FROM THE MOB--UP TO MY WORKSHOP IN HEADQUARTERS!

AND SO--
BUT WHAT IS IT, REED? THOSE BLACK BANDS IN THE SKY--WHAT CAN IT MEAN?!
GOOD QUESTIONS, SUSIE, BUT I DON'T THINK STRETCH HAS THE ANSWER!
AT THIS POINT, BEN, I DOUBT IF ANYONE ON EARTH TRULY KNOWS WHAT'S HAPPENED...

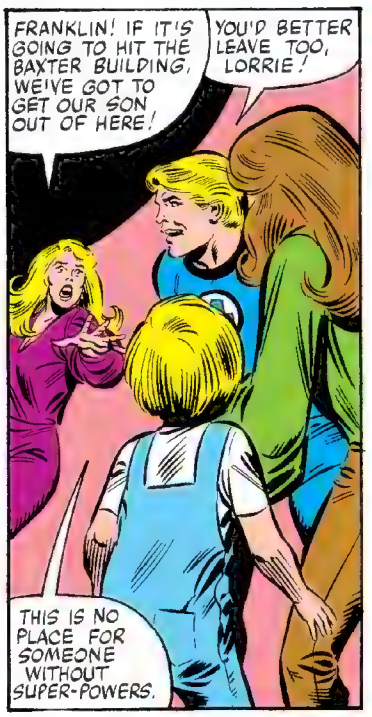

LOOK! THERE'S THE ANSWER!
THAT DARK BLOT IN THE SKY! THE BLACK STREAMERS ARE RADIATING FROM IT!

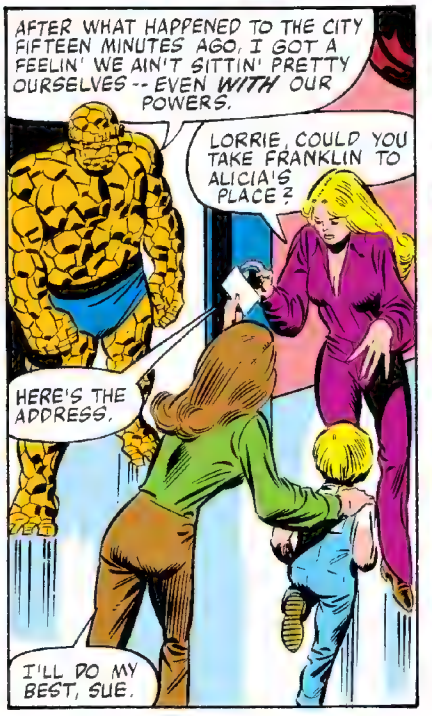

IT'S GETTING BIGGER--CLOSER--COMING STRAIGHT AT US!
IT'S ASSUMING A VAGUELY HUMAN SHAPE--! BUT WHO--OR WHAT--IS IT?!

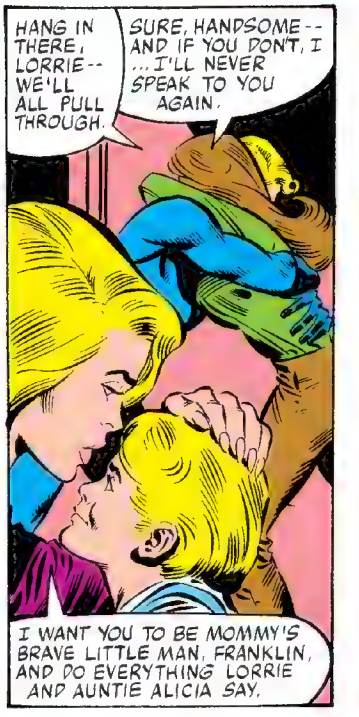

AND WHY IS IT COMING HERE, REED? WHY ALWAYS NEW YORK--? WHY ALWAYS AT US?!
I THINK I KNOW WHY, SUE -- IT'S MY SIGNAL-PULSER. I PUT IT TOGETHER TO HELP NASA LOCATE A MISSING COMSAT -- A COMMUNICATIONS SATELLITE...
IT WORKS ON THE PRINCIPLE OF ECHO-SOUNDING OR ECHOLOCATION -- IF THE ROVING SIGNAL BOUNCES OFF A SOLID OBJECT, AN ALARM IS ACTIVATED...


AND YET, RIGHT NOW IT'S BEAMING STRAIGHT AT THAT APPROACHING BLACK MASS--
--AND THE ALARM ISN'T SOUNDING, WHICH MEANS THE SIGNAL IS NOT BEING BOUNCED BACK, BUT SOMEHOW ABSORBED BY THE MASS!
REGARDLESS, THE BLACK MASS MUST BE USING THE PULSER AS A HOMING DEVICE! IT'S NOT ONLY COMING TO NEW YORK -- IT'S PLUNGING DIRECTLY AT THE BAXTER BUILDING!

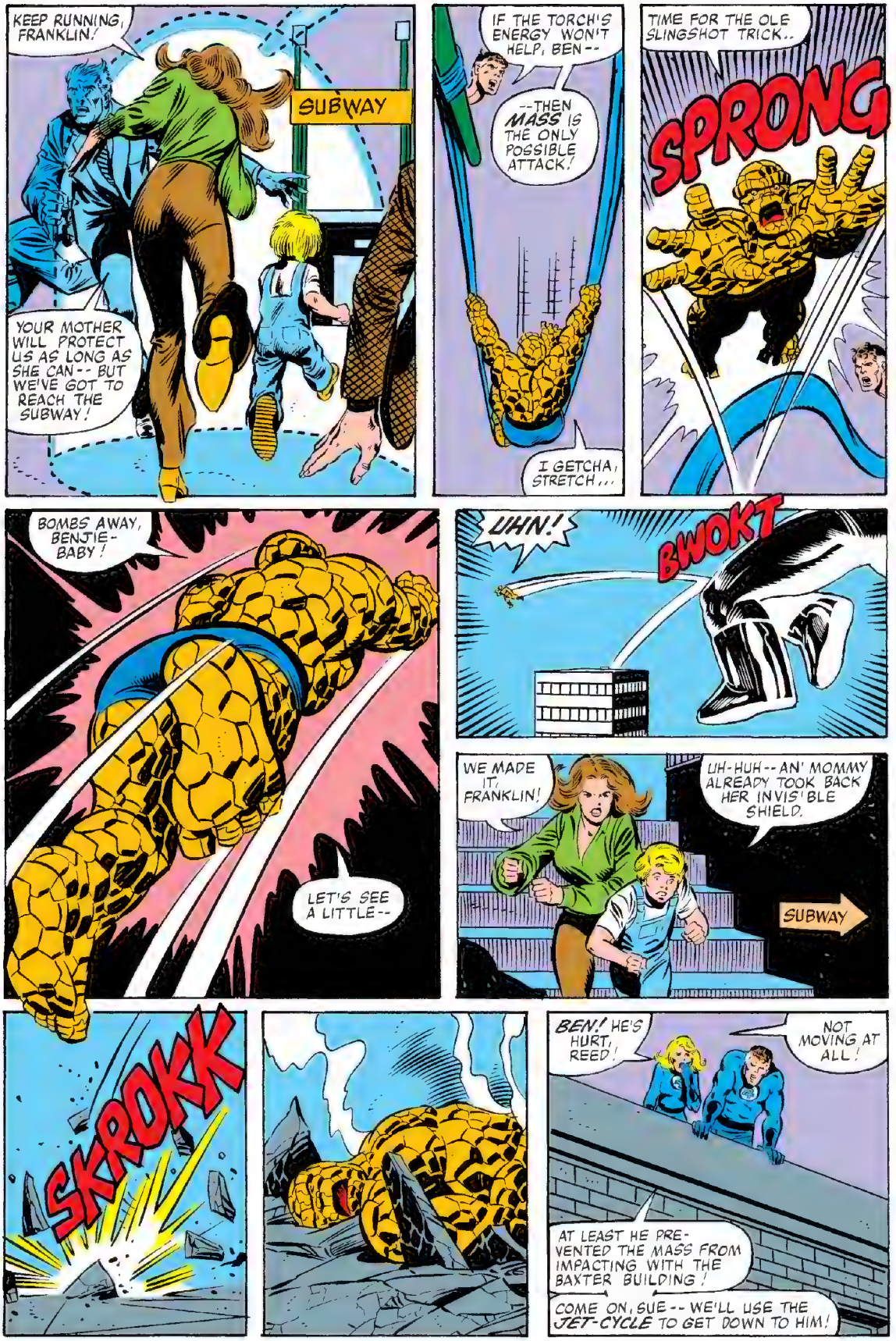
THEN THE MOB... IN A WAY... THEY WERE... RIGHT.
IT IS OUR FAULT! TURN THE PULSER OFF, REED!
I DID, SUE, BUT AT THIS POINT IT'LL DO LITTLE GOOD! THE MASS IS TOO CLOSE TO STOP--!


FRANKLIN! IF IT'S GOING TO HIT THE BAXTER BUILDING, WE'VE GOT TO GET OUR SON OUT OF HERE!
YOU'D BETTER LEAVE TOO, LORRIE!
THIS IS NO PLACE FOR SOMEONE WITHOUT SUPER-POWERS.


AFTER WHAT HAPPENED TO THE CITY FIFTEEN MINUTES AGO, I GOT A FEELIN' WE AIN'T SITTIN' PRETTY OURSELVES -- EVEN WITH OUR POWERS.
LORRIE, COULD YOU TAKE FRANKLIN TO ALICIA'S PLACE?
HERE'S THE ADDRESS.
I'LL DO MY BEST, SUE.

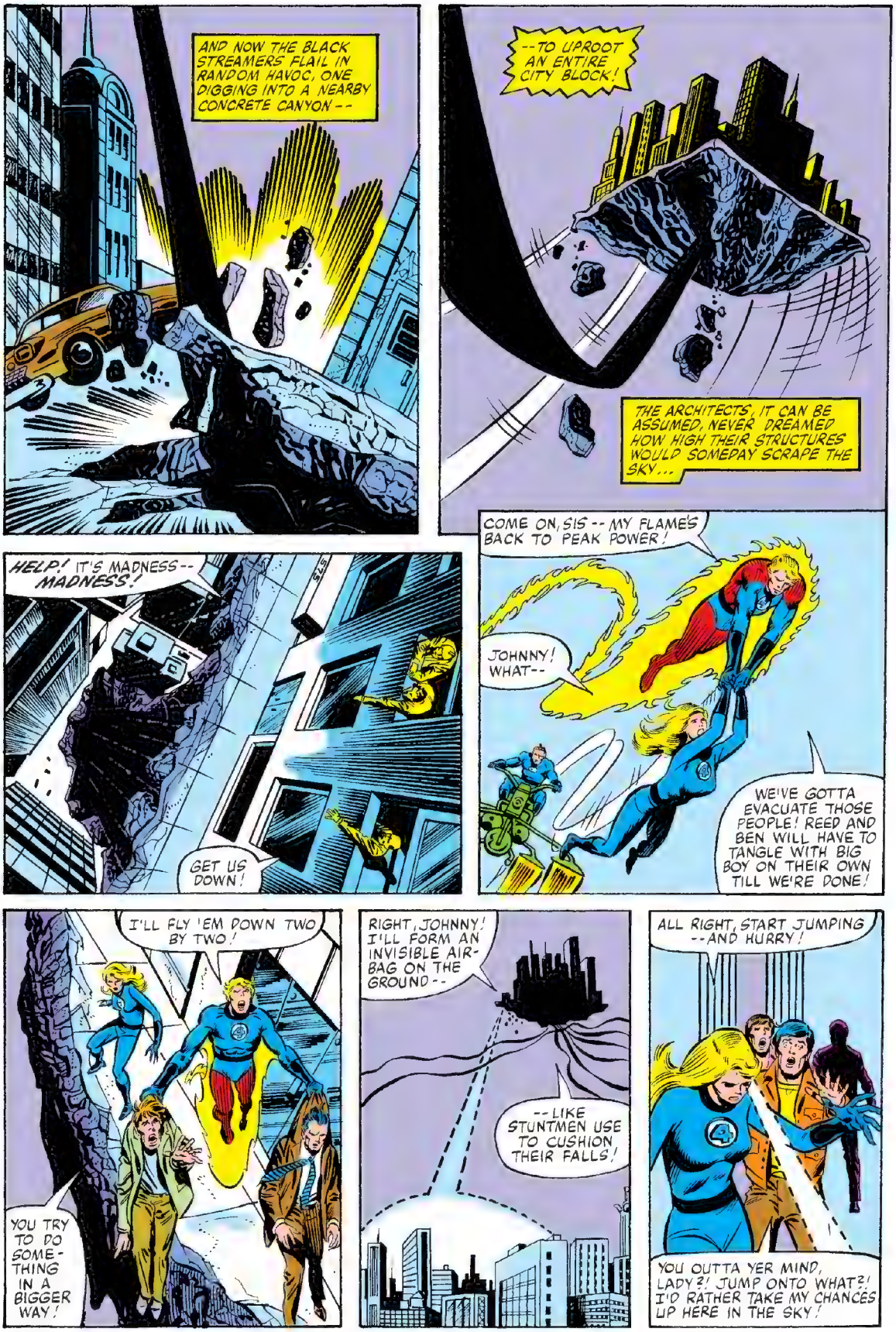

HANG IN THERE, LORRIE -- WE'LL ALL PULL THROUGH.
SURE, HANDSOME -- AND IF YOU DON'T, I ...I'LL NEVER SPEAK TO YOU AGAIN.
I WANT YOU TO BE MOMMY'S BRAVE LITTLE MAN, FRANKLIN, AND DO EVERYTHING LORRIE AND AUNTIE ALICIA SAY.

MEANWHILE, ON THE ROOF...
NO DOUBT ABOUT IT NOW, STRETCH--IT IS SOME KINDA "MAN"--AN' HE'S BLASTED HUGE.
WORSE THAN THAT, BEN--HIS SPEED AND TRAJECTORY VIRTUALLY ASSURE A COLLISION WITH THE BAXTER BUILDING!
REED--! CAN YOU SEE FRANKLIN AND LORRIE OVER THE SIDE OF THE ROOF?!
HAVE THEY REACHED THE SUBWAY YET--?
THERE THEY ARE! THE ELEVATOR WAS TOO SLOW--THEY'RE JUST EMERGING FROM THE BUILDING NOW!
IF WE'RE HIT, THEY'LL BE CRUSHED BY THE RUBBLE!
"WE'VE GOT TO USE OUR POWERS TO PROTECT THEM!"
KEEP 'EM SHIELDED, SIS!
FLAME ON!
I'LL BLAZE UP AND TRY TO DISTRACT THE THING--
--WITH A BLAST OF SUPER-NOVA INTENSITY!
BUT THE SWIFTLY PLUMMETING MASS OF BLACKNESS SLOWS ONLY A TRIFLE--
--AS IT DRAINS AWAY THE TORCH'S EXPLOSION OF LIGHT AND HEAT...
DON'T TRY ANY MORE FLAME MANEUVERS, JOHNNY--!
IT'S NO LONGER ABSORBING MASS--NO MORE OBJECTS FLYING INTO THE AIR--
--BUT IT'S STILL ABSORBING ENERGY--ALMOST LIKE A...A GRAVITY WELL!

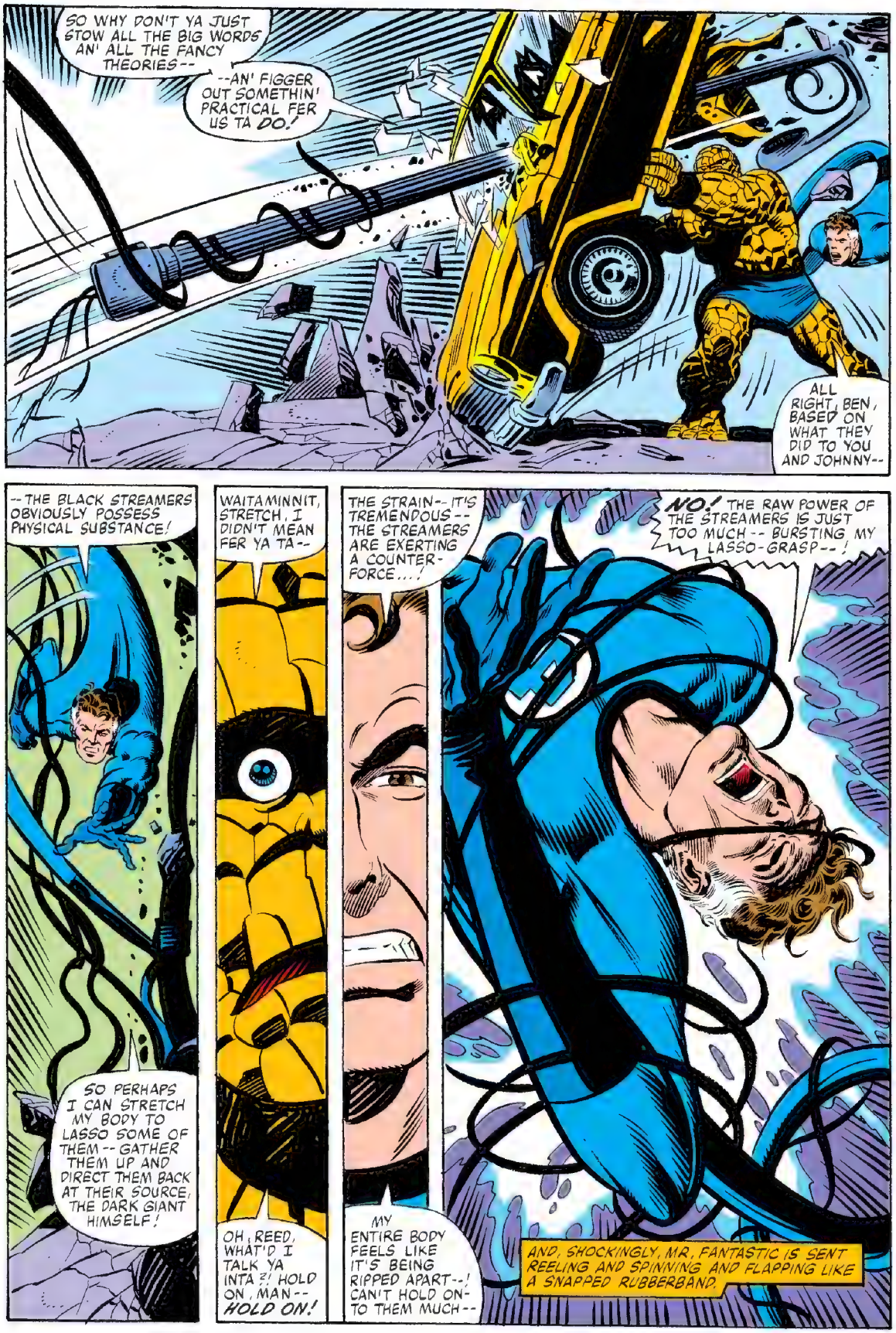

KEEP RUNNING, FRANKLIN!
SUBWAY
YOUR MOTHER WILL PROTECT US AS LONG AS SHE CAN -- BUT WE'VE GOT TO REACH THE SUBWAY!
IF THE TORCH'S ENERGY WON'T HELP, BEN --
--THEN MASS IS THE ONLY POSSIBLE ATTACK!
I GETCHA, STRETCH...
TIME FOR THE OLE SLINGSHOT TRICK..
SPRONG
BOMBS AWAY, BENJIE-BABY!
LET'S SEE A LITTLE--
UHN!
BWOKT
WE MADE IT, FRANKLIN!
UH-HUH -- AN' MOMMY ALREADY TOOK BACK HER INVIS'BLE SHIELD.
SUBWAY
SKROKK
BEN! HE'S HURT, REED!
NOT MOVING AT ALL!
AT LEAST HE PREVENTED THE MASS FROM IMPACTING WITH THE BAXTER BUILDING!
COME ON, SUE -- WE'LL USE THE JET-CYCLE TO GET DOWN TO HIM!

BENNN!
I'M COMING, BEN!!
COME ON, BEN, YOU BIG LUG--QUIT FAKIN' IT! I KNOW YOU'RE ALL RIGHT--YOU GOTTA BE ALL RIGHT!
YOU HEAR ME, BEN?! YA GOTTA BE!!
H-HUH...? WUZZAT--?
HEY, QUIT SHAKIN' ME MATCH-STICK--YA'RE INTERRUPTIN' A DREAM 'BOUT 'LICIA...
SORRY, BEN, SORRY, OLD BUDDY.
BUT THEN THE TWO COMRADES FALL UNDER A SHADOW OF DEEPEST DARKNESS, BLACKER THAN BLACK, BLOTTING OUT ALL LIGHT--SUCKING IT FROM ITS MYRIAD REFLECTIVE SURFACES --TO CHILL THE SOUL UNDER A STYGIAN PALL.
THE LOOMING MAN-MONSTER ROARS, AND THE DEAFENING NOISE IS THE VERY ABSENCE OF ALL SOUND--STABBING DEEP INTO THE MIND TO RIP EXCRUTIATING PAIN FROM THE EARS...
SEEMS RIDICULOUS TA MENTION IT ABOUT SOMETHIN' THAT BIG, TORCHIE ... BUT HE SEEMS TA BE GETTIN' SMALLER...
YOU'RE RIGHT, BEN--IT'S AS IF HE'S LOSING MASS IN THE FORM OF THOSE BLACK STREAMERS SLEWING OFF HIS BODY...
BUT HE'S STILL PLENTY POWERFUL--TEARING THE CITY APART ALREADY--WITHOUT EVEN DOING ANYTHING!

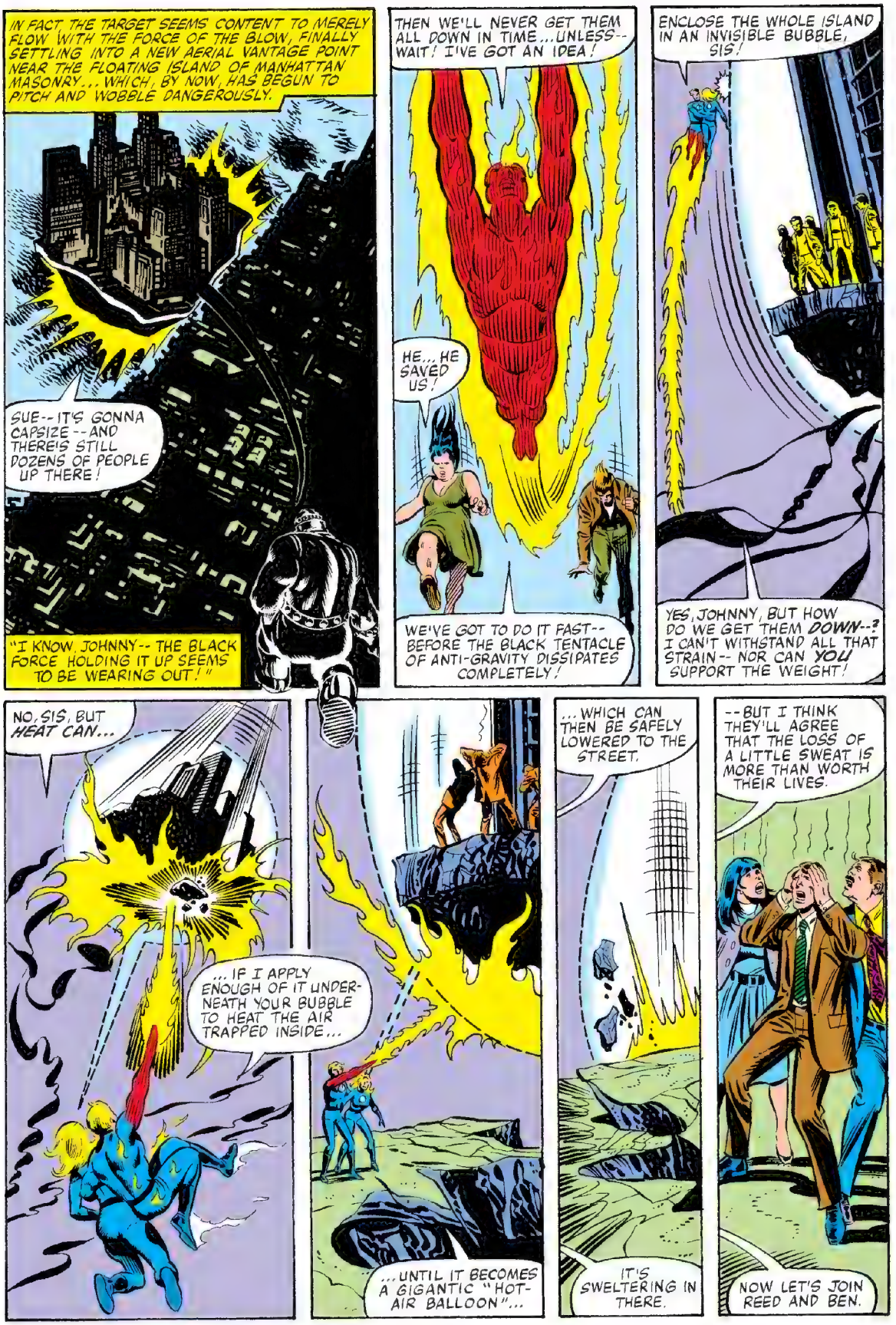
THAT MEANS HE'S STARTED ABSORBING MASS AGAIN -- AS WELL AS ENERGY!
WITHOUT MOVING, WITHOUT SO MUCH AS ACKNOWLEDGING THE FIERY GNAT BUZZING AROUND HIS EAR --
COME ON, BEN -- WE'VE GOTTA STOP HIM!
--THE TITAN STRIKES!
THE BLACK STREAMERS -- THEY'RE LIKE TENTACLES --
--WHIPPING OUT TO GRAB ME -- SUCKING AWAY MY FLAME!
CAN'T STAY ALOFT, BEN -- CATCH ME!
WHAT'D YA THINK I DO, TORCHIE -- LET YA STAIN THE SIDEWALK?
I...I NEED TIME TO RECOVER, BEN...
REST ALL YA WANT, TORCHIE, CUZ THAT UNDEVELOPED POLAROID JUST GOT MY DANDER UP...
...AN' WHEN THE EVER-LOVIN' BLUE-EYED THING GETS MAD, YOU BETTER BELIEVE IT'S CLOBBERIN' TIME!
BUT AGAIN, AS IF ACTING OF ITS OWN VOLITION, ONE OF THE BLACK TENTACLES LASHES OUT AND --
FROKT
WHAT THE -- ?! THE WRONG GUY'S GETTIN' CLOBBERED!
THEY'RE TAKING A TERRIBLE BEATING, SUE! WE'VE GOT TO HELP!
I NEVER EVEN GOT NEAR HIM!

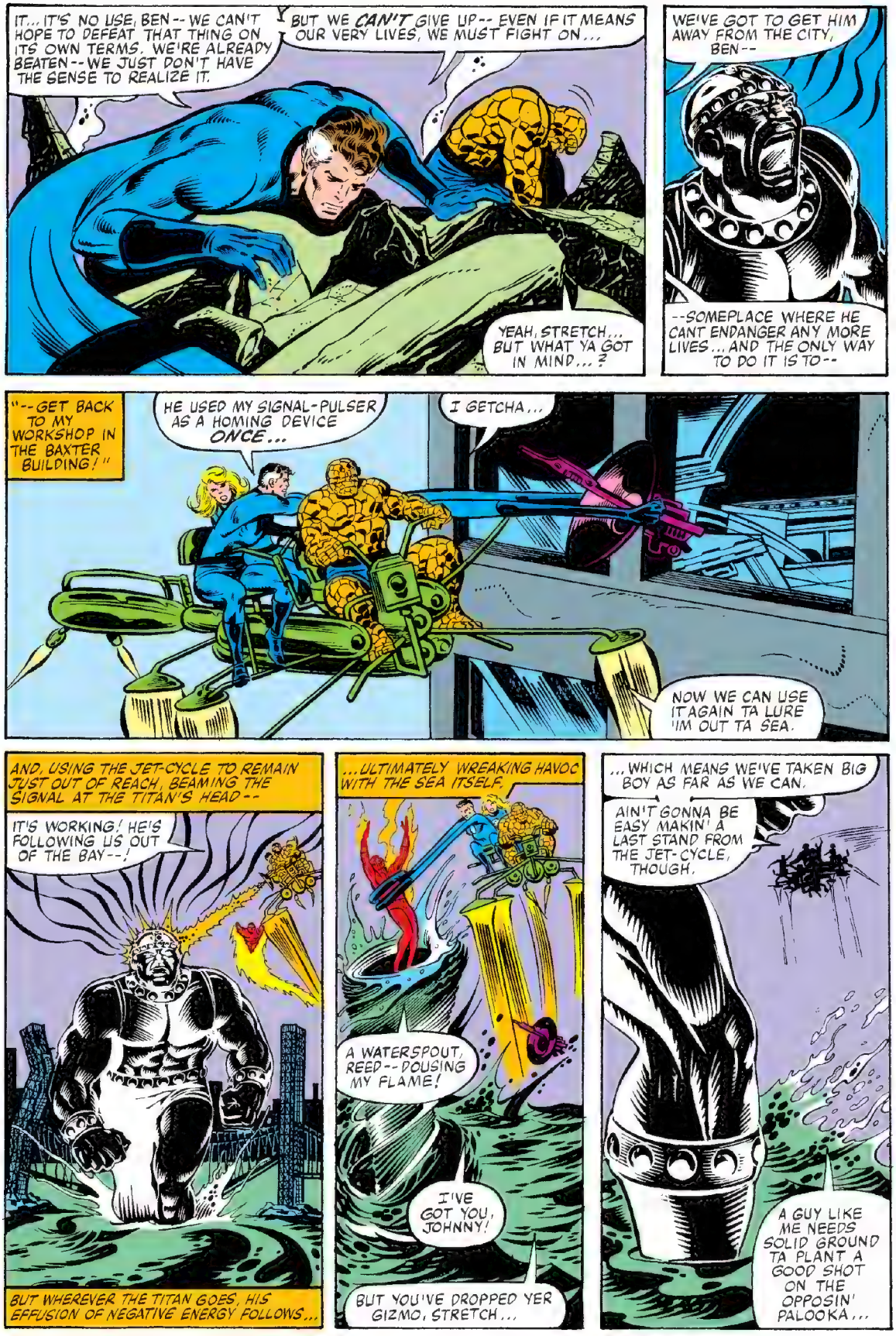

AND NOW THE BLACK STREAMERS FLAIL IN RANDOM HAVOC, ONE DIGGING INTO A NEARBY CONCRETE CANYON--
--TO UPROOT AN ENTIRE CITY BLOCK!
THE ARCHITECTS, IT CAN BE ASSUMED, NEVER DREAMED HOW HIGH THEIR STRUCTURES WOULD SOMEDAY SCRAPE THE SKY...
COME ON, SIS -- MY FLAME'S BACK TO PEAK POWER!
JOHNNY! WHAT--
WE'VE GOTTA EVACUATE THOSE PEOPLE! REED AND BEN WILL HAVE TO TANGLE WITH BIG BOY ON THEIR OWN TILL WE'RE DONE!
HELP! IT'S MADNESS-- MADNESS!
GET US DOWN!
I'LL FLY 'EM DOWN TWO BY TWO!
YOU TRY TO DO SOMETHING IN A BIGGER WAY!
RIGHT, JOHNNY! I'LL FORM AN INVISIBLE AIR-BAG ON THE GROUND--
--LIKE STUNTMEN USE TO CUSHION THEIR FALLS!
ALL RIGHT, START JUMPING --AND HURRY!
YOU OUTTA YER MIND, LADY?! JUMP ONTO WHAT?! I'D RATHER TAKE MY CHANCES UP HERE IN THE SKY!

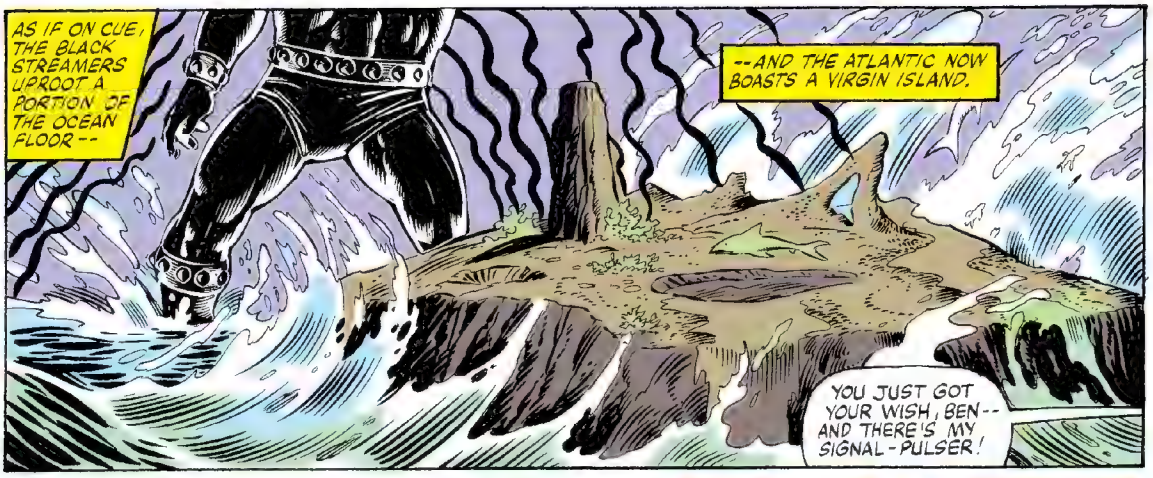
I HATE TO DO THIS...
I KNOW YOU CAN'T SEE ANYTHING DOWN THERE, BUT BELIEVE ME --
--IT'S FOR YOUR OWN GOOD!
YAHHH!
UNFF!
HEY, SHE'S TELLIN' THE TRUTH!
THERE IS AN INVISIBLE CUSHION DOWN THERE! COME ON!
BUT ONLY THE HARDY ONES MAKE THE LEAP.
MEANWHILE, IN THE SHATTERING STREET...
I ASKED YA ONCE, STRETCH, AN' I'M ASKIN' YA AGAIN-- WHAT IN THE BLASTED BLUE BLAZES IS GOIN' ON?! WHAT'RE WE UP AGAINST?!
I WISH I KNEW, BEN!
ALL THE NORMAL LAWS OF GRAVITY AND PHYSICS HAVE GONE HAYWIRE!
APPARENTLY, ANYTHING TOUCHED BY THE BLACK STREAMERS FLOWING FROM HIS BODY BECOMES PART OF THIS MAELSTROM OF DEBRIS!
NO KIDDIN! YA KNOW SOMETHIN', STRETCH? YOU'RE A REG'LAR SCIENTIFIC GENIUS. A REAL WHIZ.
BUT IN THE MEANTIME, OUR DARK GIANT FRIEND IS HAVING HIMSELF A REAL BALL IN THE DESTRUCTION DERBY UP THERE!

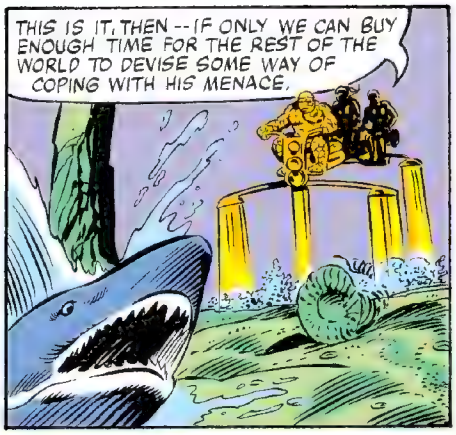

SO WHY DON'T YA JUST STOW ALL THE BIG WORDS AN' ALL THE FANCY THEORIES--
--AN' FIGGER OUT SOMETHIN' PRACTICAL FER US TA DO!
ALL RIGHT, BEN, BASED ON WHAT THEY DID TO YOU AND JOHNNY--
--THE BLACK STREAMERS OBVIOUSLY POSSESS PHYSICAL SUBSTANCE!
SO PERHAPS I CAN STRETCH MY BODY TO LASSO SOME OF THEM -- GATHER THEM UP AND DIRECT THEM BACK AT THEIR SOURCE, THE DARK GIANT HIMSELF!
WAITAMINNIT, STRETCH, I DIDN'T MEAN FER YA TA--
OH, REED, WHAT'D I TALK YA INTA?! HOLD ON, MAN-- HOLD ON!
THE STRAIN-- IT'S TREMENDOUS-- THE STREAMERS ARE EXERTING A COUNTER-FORCE...!
MY ENTIRE BODY FEELS LIKE IT'S BEING RIPPED APART--! CAN'T HOLD ON-- TO THEM MUCH--
NO! THE RAW POWER OF THE STREAMERS IS JUST TOO MUCH -- BURSTING MY LASSO-GRASP--!
AND, SHOCKINGLY, MR. FANTASTIC IS SENT REELING AND SPINNING AND FLAPPING LIKE A SNAPPED RUBBERBAND.

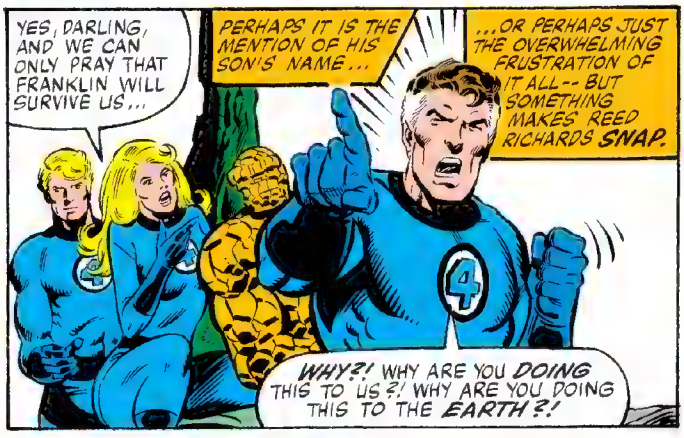
THE STYGIAN TITAN GLOATS.
REED.
THE LOUSY THING HURT REED!
THAT DOES IT! YOU JUST HURT REED RICHARDS, PAL...
YOU JUST HURT MY BEST BUDDY FROM ALMOST AS FAR BACK AS I CAN REMEMBER...
AN' I'M COMIN' TA TELL YA THAT NO ONE DOES THAT TO THE THING'S BEST BUDDY-- NO ONE!
CUZ RIGHT NOW, PAL, IT REALLY IS--
--CLOBBERIN' TIME!
THE BLOW IS TREMENDOUS, PERHAPS THE SINGLE HARDEST PUNCH THE THING HAS EVER THROWN.
BUH-WHAMM
BUT, IN SAD TRUTH, THE IMPACT HURTS THE THING FAR MORE THAN ITS TARGET.
Conrad


IN FACT, THE TARGET SEEMS CONTENT TO MERELY FLOW WITH THE FORCE OF THE BLOW, FINALLY SETTLING INTO A NEW AERIAL VANTAGE POINT NEAR THE FLOATING ISLAND OF MANHATTAN MASONRY... WHICH, BY NOW, HAS BEGUN TO PITCH AND WOBBLE DANGEROUSLY.
SUE--IT'S GONNA CAPSIZE--AND THERE'S STILL DOZENS OF PEOPLE UP THERE!
"I KNOW, JOHNNY-- THE BLACK FORCE HOLDING IT UP SEEMS TO BE WEARING OUT!"
THEN WE'LL NEVER GET THEM ALL DOWN IN TIME...UNLESS--WAIT! I'VE GOT AN IDEA!
HE...HE SAVED US!
WE'VE GOT TO DO IT FAST--BEFORE THE BLACK TENTACLE OF ANTI-GRAVITY DISSIPATES COMPLETELY!
ENCLOSE THE WHOLE ISLAND IN AN INVISIBLE BUBBLE, SIS!
YES, JOHNNY, BUT HOW DO WE GET THEM DOWN--? I CAN'T WITHSTAND ALL THAT STRAIN-- NOR CAN YOU SUPPORT THE WEIGHT!
NO, SIS, BUT HEAT CAN...
...IF I APPLY ENOUGH OF IT UNDERNEATH YOUR BUBBLE TO HEAT THE AIR TRAPPED INSIDE...
...UNTIL IT BECOMES A GIGANTIC "HOT-AIR BALLOON"...
...WHICH CAN THEN BE SAFELY LOWERED TO THE STREET.
IT'S SWELTERING IN THERE.
--BUT I THINK THEY'LL AGREE THAT THE LOSS OF A LITTLE SWEAT IS MORE THAN WORTH THEIR LIVES.
NOW LET'S JOIN REED AND BEN.

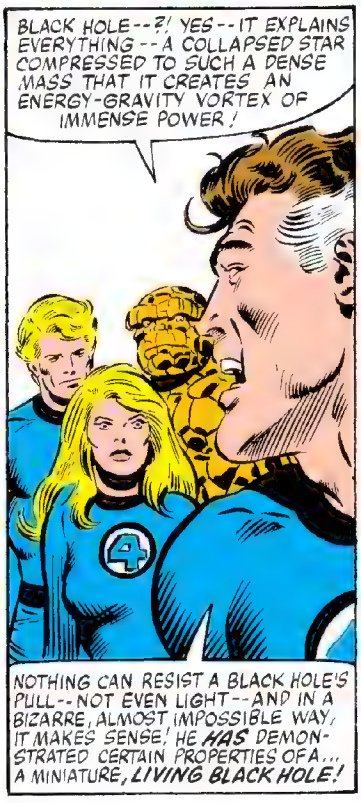

IT... IT'S NO USE, BEN -- WE CAN'T HOPE TO DEFEAT THAT THING ON ITS OWN TERMS. WE'RE ALREADY BEATEN -- WE JUST DON'T HAVE THE SENSE TO REALIZE IT.
BUT WE CAN'T GIVE UP -- EVEN IF IT MEANS OUR VERY LIVES, WE MUST FIGHT ON...
YEAH, STRETCH... BUT WHAT YA GOT IN MIND...?
WE'VE GOT TO GET HIM AWAY FROM THE CITY, BEN --
--SOMEPLACE WHERE HE CANT ENDANGER ANY MORE LIVES... AND THE ONLY WAY TO DO IT IS TO --
"-- GET BACK TO MY WORKSHOP IN THE BAXTER BUILDING!"
HE USED MY SIGNAL-PULSER AS A HOMING DEVICE ONCE...
I GETCHA...
NOW WE CAN USE IT AGAIN TA LURE 'IM OUT TA SEA.
AND, USING THE JET-CYCLE TO REMAIN JUST OUT OF REACH, BEAMING THE SIGNAL AT THE TITAN'S HEAD --
IT'S WORKING! HE'S FOLLOWING US OUT OF THE BAY --!
BUT WHEREVER THE TITAN GOES, HIS EFFUSION OF NEGATIVE ENERGY FOLLOWS...
...ULTIMATELY WREAKING HAVOC WITH THE SEA ITSELF.
A WATERSPOUT, REED -- DOUSING MY FLAME!
I'VE GOT YOU, JOHNNY!
BUT YOU'VE DROPPED YER GIZMO, STRETCH...
...WHICH MEANS WE'VE TAKEN BIG BOY AS FAR AS WE CAN.
AIN'T GONNA BE EASY MAKIN' A LAST STAND FROM THE JET-CYCLE, THOUGH.
A GUY LIKE ME NEEDS SOLID GROUND TA PLANT A GOOD SHOT ON THE OPPOSIN' PALOOKA...


AS IF ON CUE, THE BLACK STREAMERS UPROOT A PORTION OF THE OCEAN FLOOR --
--AND THE ATLANTIC NOW BOASTS A VIRGIN ISLAND.
YOU JUST GOT YOUR WISH, BEN-- AND THERE'S MY SIGNAL-PULSER!


THIS IS IT, THEN -- IF ONLY WE CAN BUY ENOUGH TIME FOR THE REST OF THE WORLD TO DEVISE SOME WAY OF COPING WITH HIS MENACE.

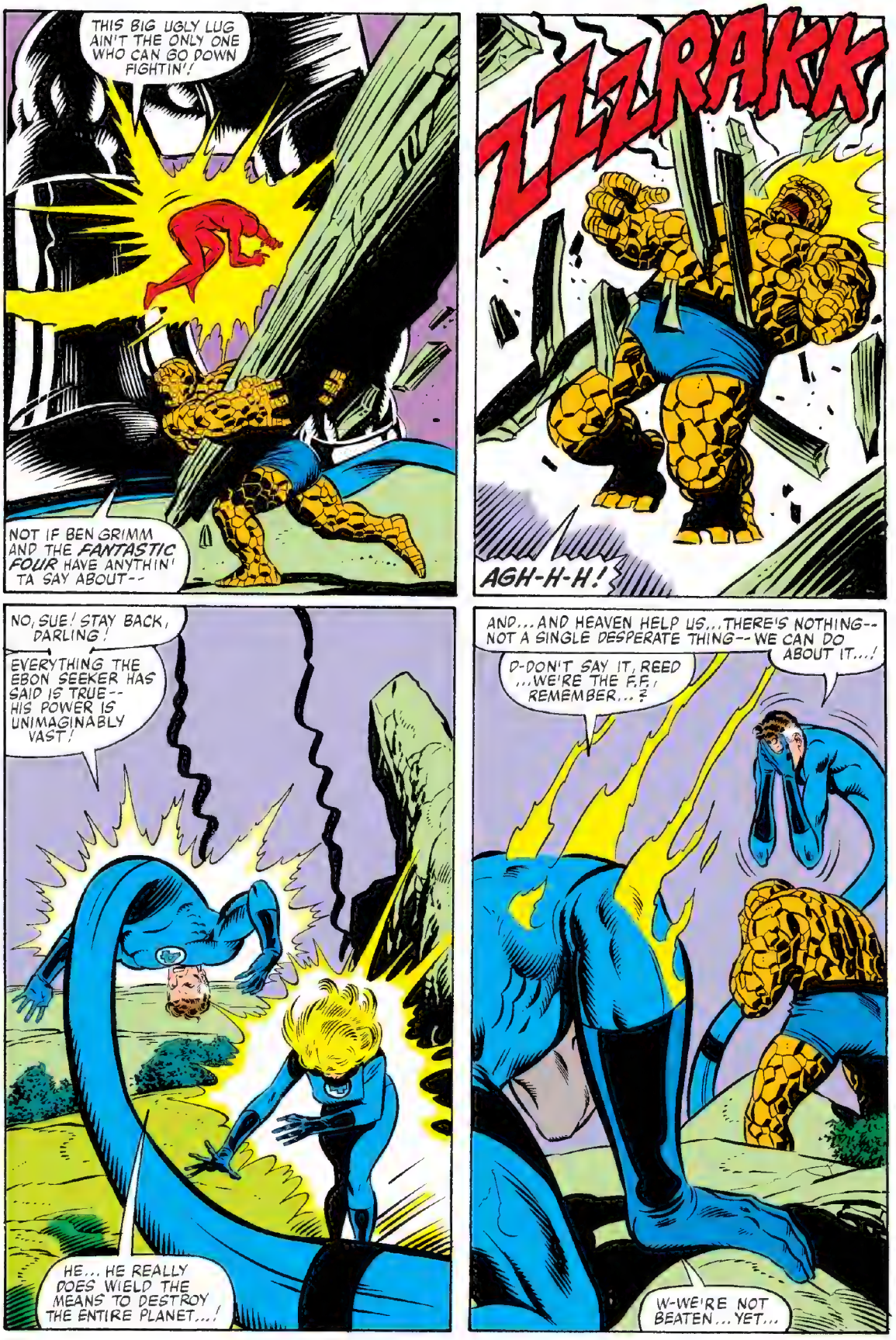

YES, DARLING, AND WE CAN ONLY PRAY THAT FRANKLIN WILL SURVIVE US...
PERHAPS IT IS THE MENTION OF HIS SON'S NAME...
...OR PERHAPS JUST THE OVERWHELMING FRUSTRATION OF IT ALL-- BUT SOMETHING MAKES REED RICHARDS SNAP.
WHY?! WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS TO US?! WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS TO THE EARTH?!

AND, INCREDIBLY, MADNESS LEAVES THE TITAN LONG ENOUGH FOR HIM TO REPLY, "SPEAKING" WITHOUT SOUND DIRECTLY TO THE MIND...
YOU KNOW WHY! EARTH IS TRYING TO KILL ME-- JUST AS SO MANY OTHER PLANETS HAVE KILLED ME!
ALL MY LIFE -- BILLIONS OF EONS -- I HAVE SOUGHT OTHER LIFE--
--AND EVERY TIME I COME IN CONTACT WITH IT, I AM DESTROYED! SO IT HAS BEEN EVER SINCE I FIRST ESCAPED FROM THE HEART OF THE BLACK HOLE!

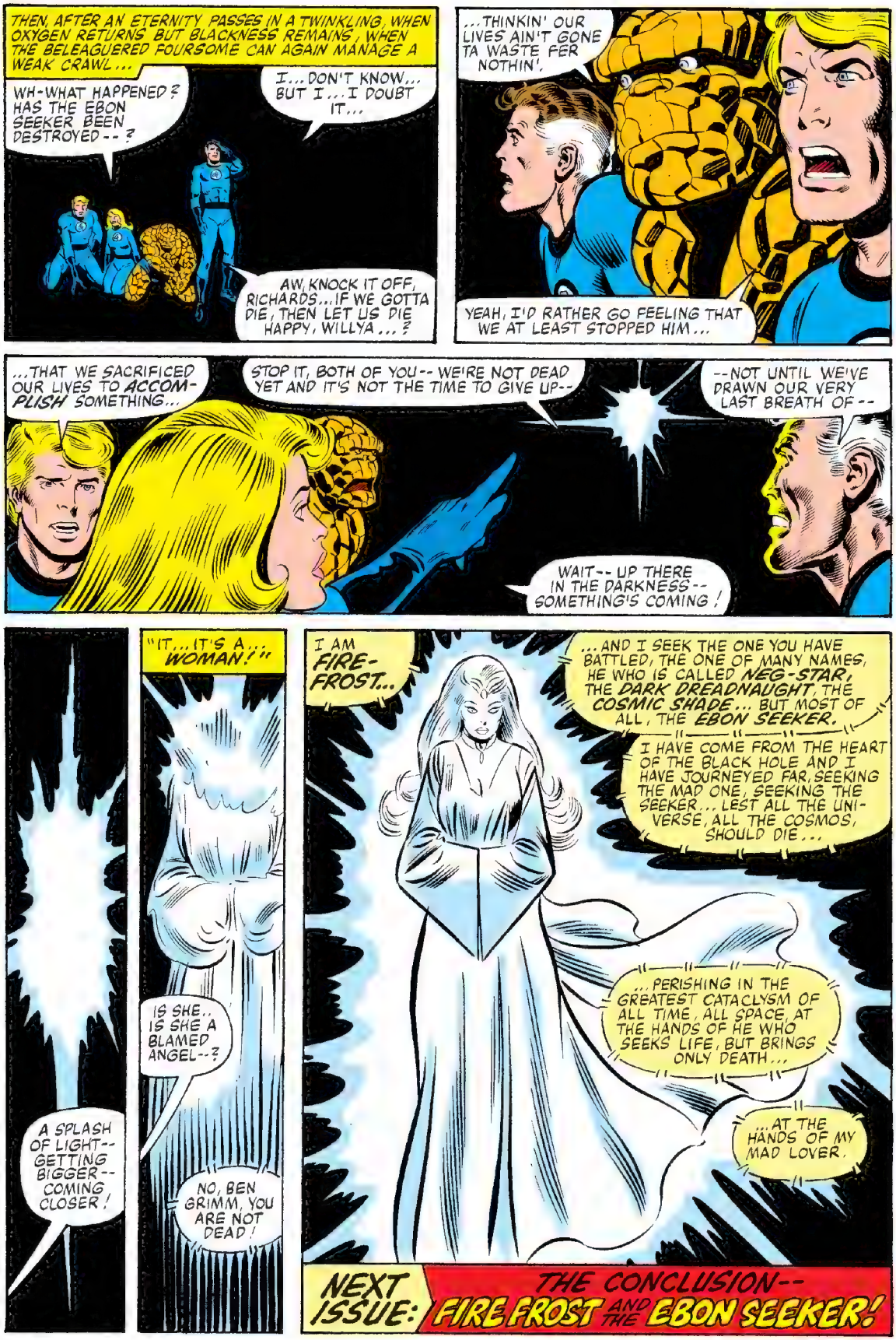

BLACK HOLE--?! YES -- IT EXPLAINS EVERYTHING -- A COLLAPSED STAR COMPRESSED TO SUCH A DENSE MASS THAT IT CREATES AN ENERGY-GRAVITY VORTEX OF IMMENSE POWER!
NOTHING CAN RESIST A BLACK HOLE'S PULL -- NOT EVEN LIGHT -- AND IN A BIZARRE, ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE WAY, IT MAKES SENSE! HE HAS DEMONSTRATED CERTAIN PROPERTIES OF A... A MINIATURE, LIVING BLACK HOLE!

YOUR PLANET IS EVEN NOW DRAINING OFF MY LIFE-ENERGIES TO DESTROY ME! THE WORLD YOU CALL HOME IS NAUGHT BUT A SINGLE COLOSSAL TRAP FOR ME--
--A TRAP YOU BAITED WITH YOUR HOMING SIGNAL--
--A DEVICE WHICH COULD ONLY HAVE BEEN CREATED BY INTELLIGENT HANDS -- A DEVICE I WAS BOUND TO INVESTIGATE!

DON'T YOU SEE--? I MUST SEEK LIFE! IT IS MY DUTY, MY ENTIRE REASON FOR EXISTENCE!
I AM THE EBON SEEKER-- AND I AM FATED TO SEEK LIFE THROUGH THE EBON VASTNESS OF SPACE-- INTELLIGENT LIFE-- FOREVER! BUT EVERY TIME I FIND IT, I DIE... EVEN AS I AM DYING NOW...
HE...HE IS SMALLER THAN WHEN HE FIRST APPEARED...
BUT THE REST OF WHAT HE SAID-- NONE OF IT MAKES SENSE...
HIS MASS IS BEING REDUCED BY THE CONSTANT DRAIN OF NEGATIVE ENERGY-- THOSE BLACK STREAMERS FLOWING FROM HIM--AS IF HE'S BLEEDING TO DEATH...
WAIT--LISTEN TO REASON! IF YOU EXPLAIN TO US, PERHAPS WE CAN HELP!
NO MORE TRICKS!
I AM DYING, YES, BUT I WILL NOT DIE UNTIL I HAVE DESTROYED YOU AND YOUR PLANET--
--FOR THAT IS THE ONLY WAY I CAN BE REBORN-- THE ONLY WAY I CAN CONTINUE MY ETERNAL MISSION OF SEEKING!
DEATH FOR LIFE-- LIFE IN DEATH!
HWAM
REED--!
KRAK!
FLAME ON!!
HANG TIGHT, SUSIE...


THIS BIG UGLY LUG AIN'T THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN GO DOWN FIGHTIN'!
NOT IF BEN GRIMM AND THE FANTASTIC FOUR HAVE ANYTHIN' TA SAY ABOUT--
ZZZRAKK
AGH-H-H!
NO, SUE! STAY BACK, DARLING!
EVERYTHING THE EBON SEEKER HAS SAID IS TRUE-- HIS POWER IS UNIMAGINABLY VAST!
HE... HE REALLY DOES WIELD THE MEANS TO DESTROY THE ENTIRE PLANET...!
AND... AND HEAVEN HELP US,.. THERE'S NOTHING-- NOT A SINGLE DESPERATE THING-- WE CAN DO ABOUT IT...!
D-DON'T SAY IT, REED ...WE'RE THE F.F., REMEMBER...?
W-WE'RE NOT BEATEN... YET...

MAYBE NOT, JOHNNY STORM -- BUT NOW...
BLACKNESS -- CAN'T SEE OR HEAR! CHOKING--!
HIS ENERGY -- LIKE THE GRAVITY WELL OF A BLACK HOLE -- ABSORBING ALL LIGHT -- ALL ATMOSPHERE -- EVERYTHING!
...NOW, THE FANTASTIC FOUR ARE BEATEN.
COMPLETELY, THOROUGHLY... BEATEN.


THEN, AFTER AN ETERNITY PASSES IN A TWINKLING, WHEN OXYGEN RETURNS BUT BLACKNESS REMAINS, WHEN THE BELEAGUERED FOURSOME CAN AGAIN MANAGE A WEAK CRAWL...
WH-WHAT HAPPENED? HAS THE EBON SEEKER BEEN DESTROYED--?
I... DON'T KNOW... BUT I... I DOUBT IT...
AW, KNOCK IT OFF, RICHARDS... IF WE GOTTA DIE, THEN LET US DIE HAPPY, WILLYA...?
...THINKIN' OUR LIVES AIN'T GONE TA WASTE FER NOTHIN',
YEAH, I'D RATHER GO FEELING THAT WE AT LEAST STOPPED HIM...
...THAT WE SACRIFICED OUR LIVES TO ACCOMPLISH SOMETHING...
STOP IT, BOTH OF YOU-- WE'RE NOT DEAD YET AND IT'S NOT THE TIME TO GIVE UP--
--NOT UNTIL WE'VE DRAWN OUR VERY LAST BREATH OF--
WAIT-- UP THERE IN THE DARKNESS-- SOMETHING'S COMING!
A SPLASH OF LIGHT-- GETTING BIGGER-- COMING CLOSER!
"IT... IT'S A... WOMAN!"
IS SHE... IS SHE A BLAMED ANGEL--?
NO, BEN GRIMM, YOU ARE NOT DEAD!
I AM FIRE-FROST...
...AND I SEEK THE ONE YOU HAVE BATTLED, THE ONE OF MANY NAMES, HE WHO IS CALLED NEG-STAR, THE DARK DREADNAUGHT, THE COSMIC SHADE... BUT MOST OF ALL, THE EBON SEEKER.
I HAVE COME FROM THE HEART OF THE BLACK HOLE AND I HAVE JOURNEYED FAR, SEEKING THE MAD ONE, SEEKING THE SEEKER... LEST ALL THE UNIVERSE, ALL THE COSMOS, SHOULD DIE...
...PERISHING IN THE GREATEST CATACLYSM OF ALL TIME, ALL SPACE, AT THE HANDS OF HE WHO SEEKS LIFE, BUT BRINGS ONLY DEATH...
...AT THE HANDS OF MY MAD LOVER.
NEXT ISSUE: THE CONCLUSION-- FIRE FROST AND THE EBON SEEKER!

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THE WORLD'S GREATEST COMIC MAGAZINE!
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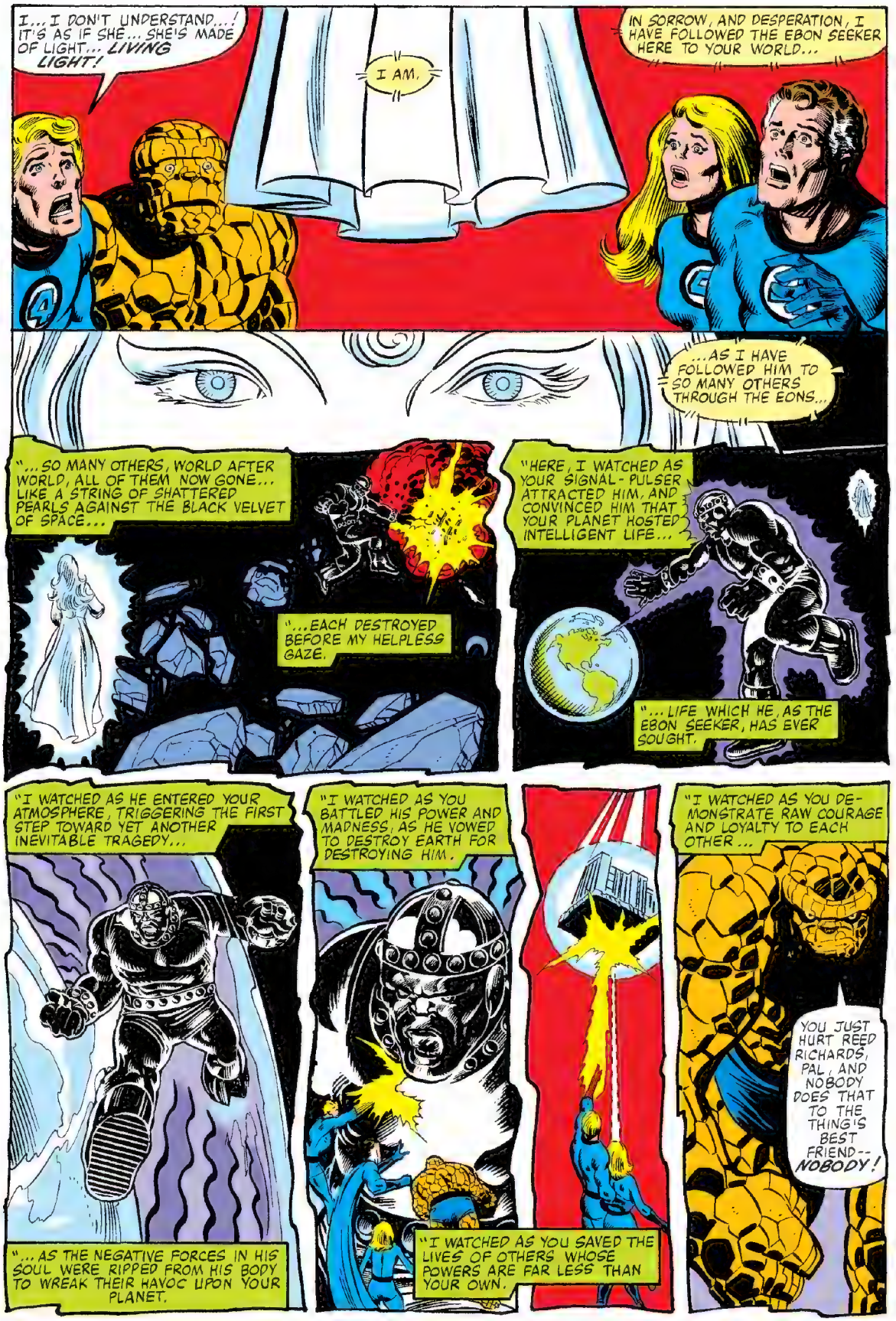
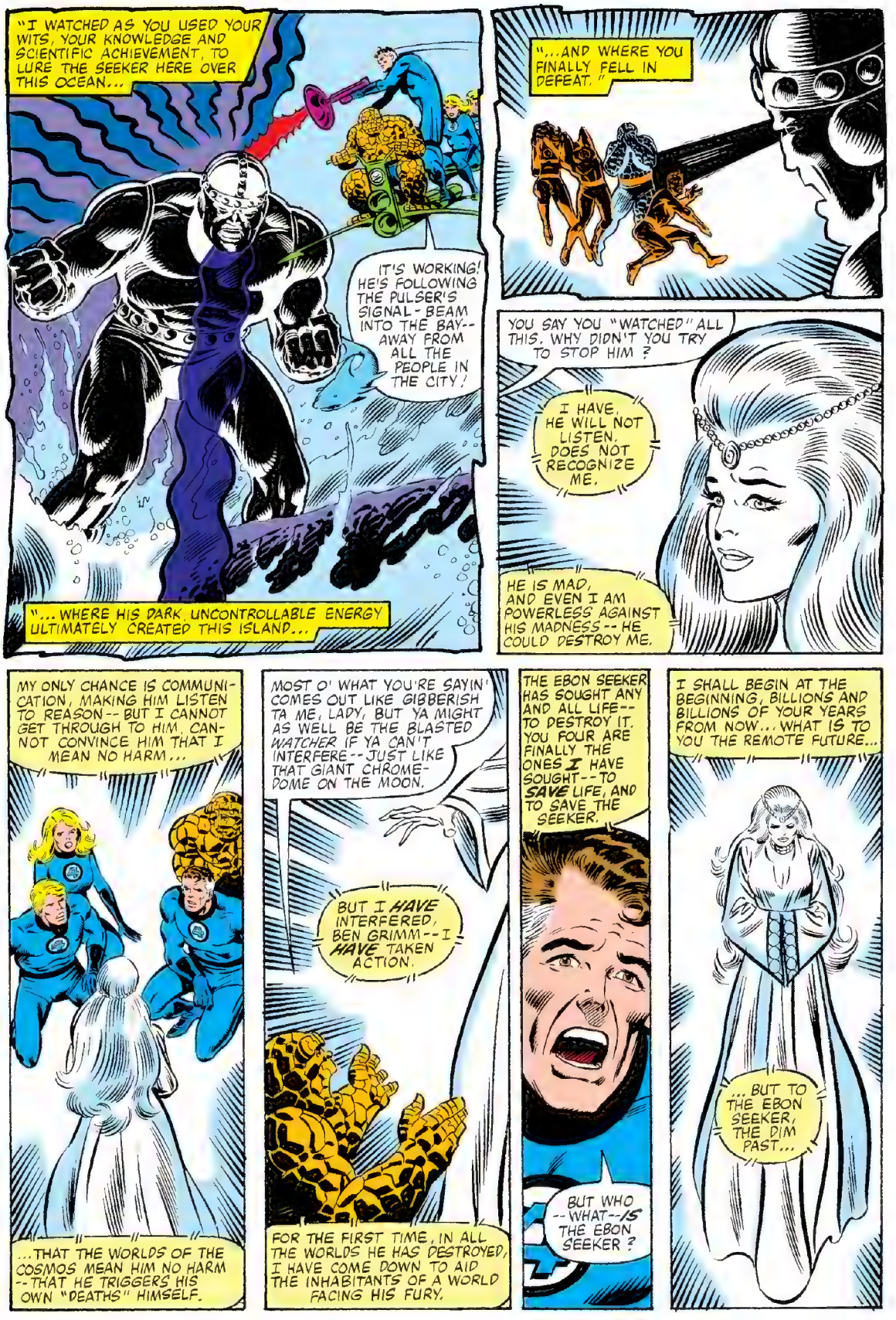
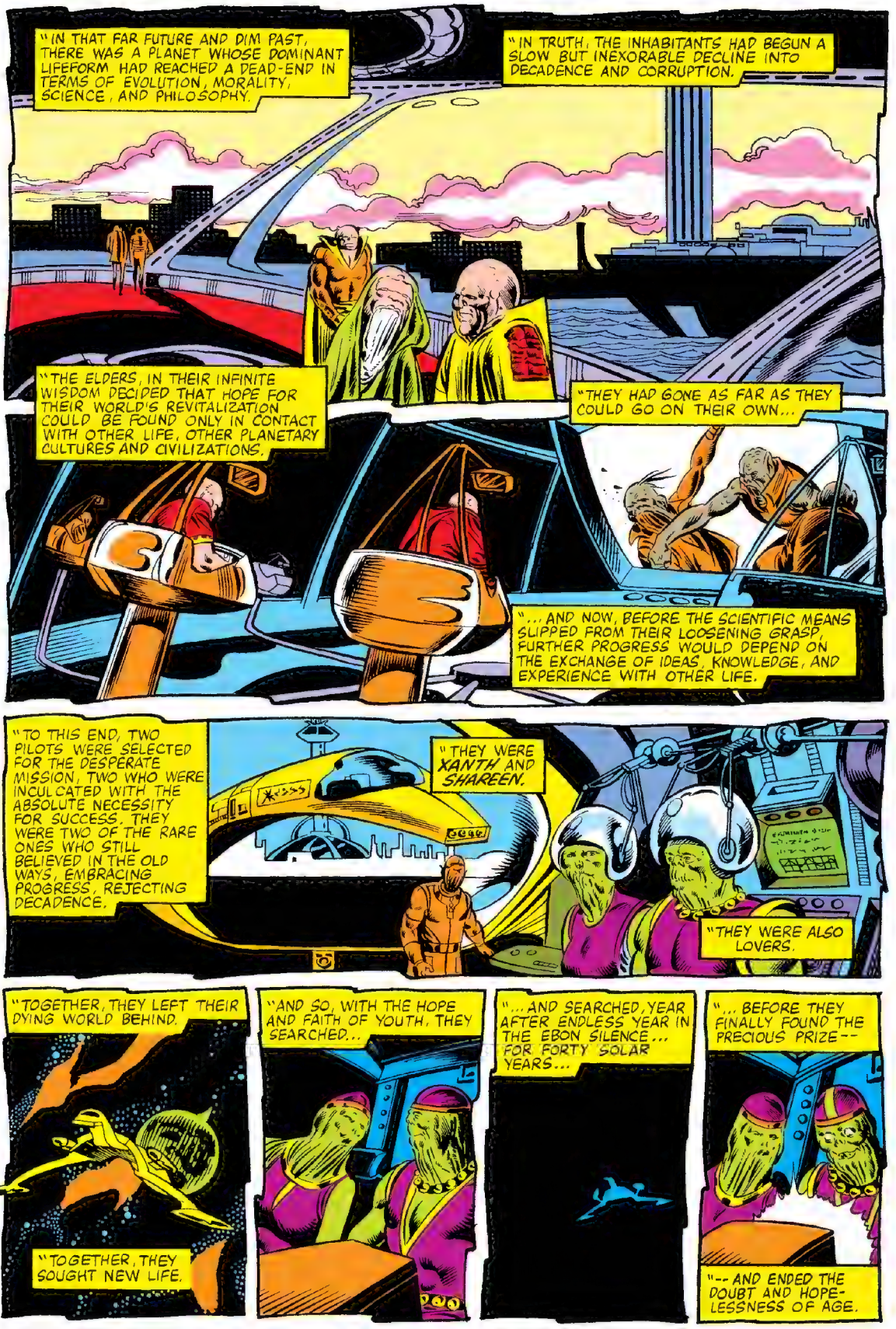
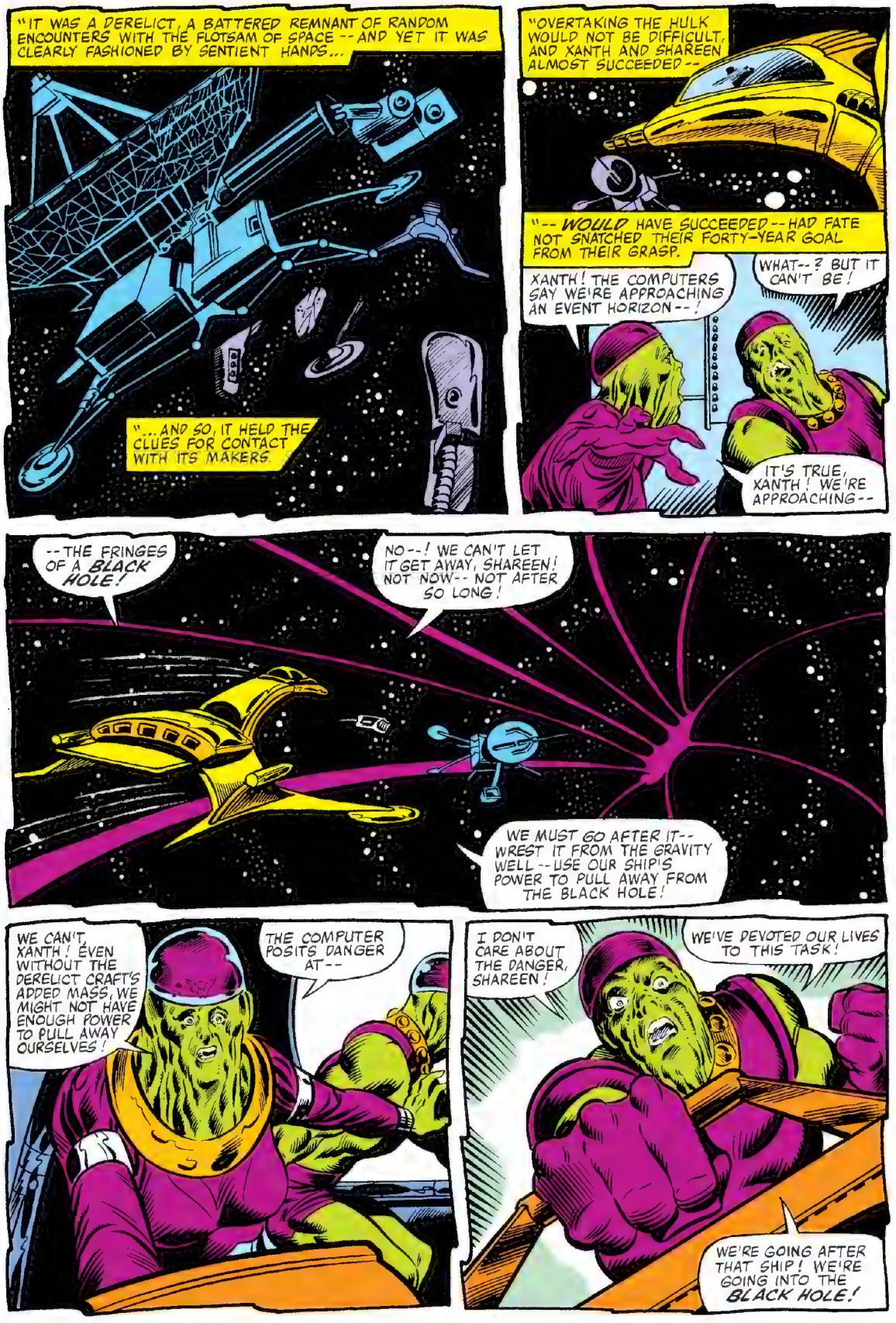
Fantastic Four
BUSCEMA
JOE S.
STAY BACK, AVENGERS!
THE FANTASTIC FOUR WILL HANDLE THIS!

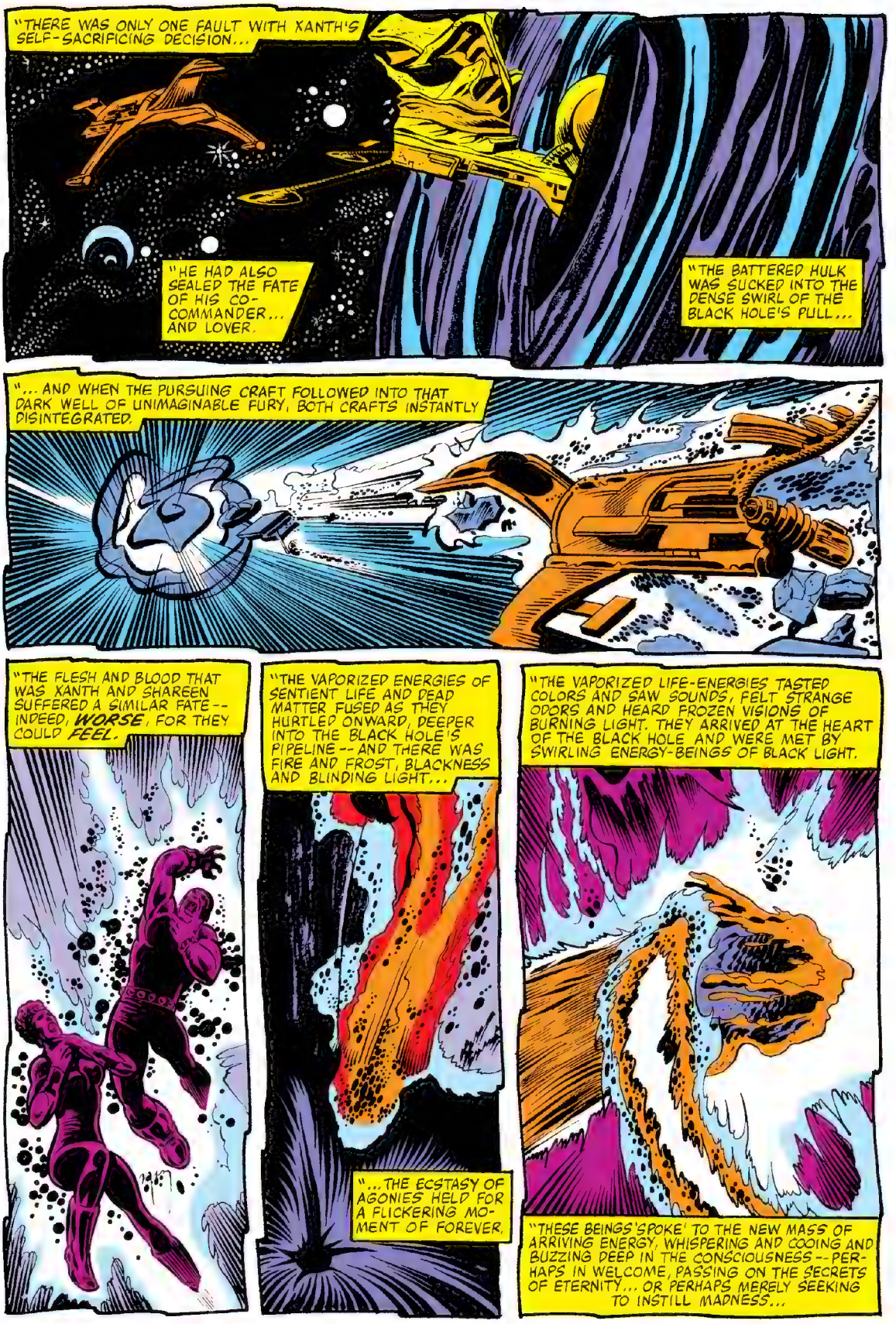
Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE FANTASTIC FOUR!®
DOUG MOENCH / WRITER
BILL SIENKIEWICZ & JOE SINNOTT / ARTISTS
JIM NOVAK / LETTERER
GEORGE ROUSSOS / COLORIST
JIM SALICRUP / EDITOR
JIM SHOOTER / EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
LURED TO SEA OFF THE PORT OF NEW YORK, THE COSMIC DESTROYER KNOWN AS THE EBON SEEKER UPROOTED A SECTION OF THE OCEAN FLOOR TO CREATE AN ISLAND WHERE NONE HAD EXISTED BEFORE. IT WAS HERE THAT A PALL OF TANGIBLE DARKNESS FINALLY EXPLODED FROM THE SEEKER'S HEART, SHROUDING THE FANTASTIC FOUR IN DESPAIR AND DEFEAT. BUT NOW -- THE DARKNESS IS PIERCED BY THE SHIMMERING CELESTIAL VISION OF A WOMAN...
IF SHE AIN'T A BLASTED ANGEL, THEN WE'RE STILL ALIVE -- THE EBON SEEKER DIDN'T KILL US!
BUT... BUT WHO IS SHE--?
I AM FIREFROST -- AND I SEEK THE ONE YOU HAVE BATTLED, THE ONE OF MANY NAMES, HE WHO IS CALLED NEG-STAR, THE DARK DREADNOUGHT, THE COSMIC SHADE, BUT MOST OF ALL ... THE EBON SEEKER.
I HAVE COME FROM THE HEART OF THE BLACK HOLE AND I HAVE JOURNEYED FAR, SEEKING THE MAD ONE, SEEKING THE SEEKER--LEST ALL THE UNIVERSE, ALL THE COSMOS, SHOULD DIE...
... PERISHING IN THE GREATEST CATACLYSM OF ALL TIME, ALL SPACE, AT THE HANDS OF HE WHO SEEKS LIFE... BUT BRINGS ONLY DEATH.
FIREFROST AND THE EBON SEEKER


I... I DON'T UNDERSTAND...! IT'S AS IF SHE... SHE'S MADE OF LIGHT... LIVING LIGHT!
I AM.
IN SORROW, AND DESPERATION, I HAVE FOLLOWED THE EBON SEEKER HERE TO YOUR WORLD...
...AS I HAVE FOLLOWED HIM TO SO MANY OTHERS THROUGH THE EONS...
"...SO MANY OTHERS, WORLD AFTER WORLD, ALL OF THEM NOW GONE... LIKE A STRING OF SHATTERED PEARLS AGAINST THE BLACK VELVET OF SPACE...
"...EACH DESTROYED BEFORE MY HELPLESS GAZE.
"HERE, I WATCHED AS YOUR SIGNAL-PULSER ATTRACTED HIM, AND CONVINCED HIM THAT YOUR PLANET HOSTED INTELLIGENT LIFE...
"...LIFE WHICH HE, AS THE EBON SEEKER, HAS EVER SOUGHT.
"I WATCHED AS HE ENTERED YOUR ATMOSPHERE, TRIGGERING THE FIRST STEP TOWARD YET ANOTHER INEVITABLE TRAGEDY...
"...AS THE NEGATIVE FORCES IN HIS SOUL WERE RIPPED FROM HIS BODY TO WREAK THEIR HAVOC UPON YOUR PLANET.
"I WATCHED AS YOU BATTLED HIS POWER AND MADNESS, AS HE VOWED TO DESTROY EARTH FOR DESTROYING HIM.
"I WATCHED AS YOU SAVED THE LIVES OF OTHERS WHOSE POWERS ARE FAR LESS THAN YOUR OWN.
"I WATCHED AS YOU DEMONSTRATE RAW COURAGE AND LOYALTY TO EACH OTHER...
YOU JUST HURT REED RICHARDS, PAL, AND NOBODY DOES THAT TO THE THING'S BEST FRIEND--NOBODY!

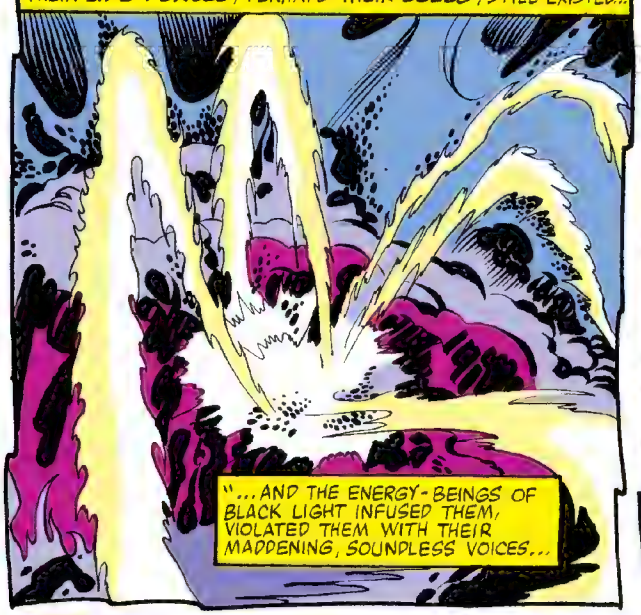

"I WATCHED AS YOU USED YOUR WITS, YOUR KNOWLEDGE AND SCIENTIFIC ACHIEVEMENT, TO LURE THE SEEKER HERE OVER THIS OCEAN...
IT'S WORKING! HE'S FOLLOWING THE PULSER'S SIGNAL-BEAM INTO THE BAY--AWAY FROM ALL THE PEOPLE IN THE CITY!
"...WHERE HIS DARK, UNCONTROLLABLE ENERGY ULTIMATELY CREATED THIS ISLAND...
"...AND WHERE YOU FINALLY FELL IN DEFEAT."
YOU SAY YOU "WATCHED" ALL THIS. WHY DIDN'T YOU TRY TO STOP HIM?
I HAVE. HE WILL NOT LISTEN. DOES NOT RECOGNIZE ME.
HE IS MAD, AND EVEN I AM POWERLESS AGAINST HIS MADNESS--HE COULD DESTROY ME.
MY ONLY CHANCE IS COMMUNICATION, MAKING HIM LISTEN TO REASON--BUT I CANNOT GET THROUGH TO HIM. CANNOT CONVINCE HIM THAT I MEAN NO HARM...
...THAT THE WORLDS OF THE COSMOS MEAN HIM NO HARM--THAT HE TRIGGERS HIS OWN "DEATHS" HIMSELF.
MOST O' WHAT YOU'RE SAYIN' COMES OUT LIKE GIBBERISH TA ME, LADY, BUT YA MIGHT AS WELL BE THE BLASTED WATCHER IF YA CAN'T INTERFERE--JUST LIKE THAT GIANT CHROME-DOME ON THE MOON.
BUT I HAVE INTERFERED, BEN GRIMM--I HAVE TAKEN ACTION.
FOR THE FIRST TIME, IN ALL THE WORLDS HE HAS DESTROYED, I HAVE COME DOWN TO AID THE INHABITANTS OF A WORLD FACING HIS FURY.
THE EBON SEEKER HAS SOUGHT ANY AND ALL LIFE--TO DESTROY IT. YOU FOUR ARE FINALLY THE ONES I HAVE SOUGHT--TO SAVE LIFE, AND TO SAVE THE SEEKER.
BUT WHO--WHAT--IS THE EBON SEEKER?
I SHALL BEGIN AT THE BEGINNING, BILLIONS AND BILLIONS OF YOUR YEARS FROM NOW... WHAT IS TO YOU THE REMOTE FUTURE...
...BUT TO THE EBON SEEKER, THE DIM PAST...


"IN THAT FAR FUTURE AND DIM PAST, THERE WAS A PLANET WHOSE DOMINANT LIFEFORM HAD REACHED A DEAD-END IN TERMS OF EVOLUTION, MORALITY, SCIENCE, AND PHILOSOPHY.
"IN TRUTH, THE INHABITANTS HAD BEGUN A SLOW BUT INEXORABLE DECLINE INTO DECADENCE AND CORRUPTION.
"THE ELDERS, IN THEIR INFINITE WISDOM DECIDED THAT HOPE FOR THEIR WORLD'S REVITALIZATION COULD BE FOUND ONLY IN CONTACT WITH OTHER LIFE, OTHER PLANETARY CULTURES AND CIVILIZATIONS.
"THEY HAD GONE AS FAR AS THEY COULD GO ON THEIR OWN...
"... AND NOW, BEFORE THE SCIENTIFIC MEANS SLIPPED FROM THEIR LOOSENING GRASP, FURTHER PROGRESS WOULD DEPEND ON THE EXCHANGE OF IDEAS, KNOWLEDGE, AND EXPERIENCE WITH OTHER LIFE.
"TO THIS END, TWO PILOTS WERE SELECTED FOR THE DESPERATE MISSION, TWO WHO WERE INCULCATED WITH THE ABSOLUTE NECESSITY FOR SUCCESS. THEY WERE TWO OF THE RARE ONES WHO STILL BELIEVED IN THE OLD WAYS, EMBRACING PROGRESS, REJECTING DECADENCE.
"THEY WERE XANTH AND SHAREEN.
"THEY WERE ALSO LOVERS.
"TOGETHER, THEY LEFT THEIR DYING WORLD BEHIND.
"TOGETHER, THEY SOUGHT NEW LIFE.
"AND SO, WITH THE HOPE AND FAITH OF YOUTH, THEY SEARCHED...
"... AND SEARCHED, YEAR AFTER ENDLESS YEAR IN THE EBON SILENCE... FOR FORTY SOLAR YEARS...
"... BEFORE THEY FINALLY FOUND THE PRECIOUS PRIZE--
"-- AND ENDED THE DOUBT AND HOPELESSNESS OF AGE.


"IT WAS A DERELICT, A BATTERED REMNANT OF RANDOM ENCOUNTERS WITH THE FLOTSAM OF SPACE -- AND YET IT WAS CLEARLY FASHIONED BY SENTIENT HANDS...
"...AND SO, IT HELD THE CLUES FOR CONTACT WITH ITS MAKERS.
"OVERTAKING THE HULK WOULD NOT BE DIFFICULT, AND XANTH AND SHAREEN ALMOST SUCCEEDED --
"-- WOULD HAVE SUCCEEDED -- HAD FATE NOT SNATCHED THEIR FORTY-YEAR GOAL FROM THEIR GRASP.
XANTH! THE COMPUTERS SAY WE'RE APPROACHING AN EVENT HORIZON --!
WHAT--? BUT IT CAN'T BE!
IT'S TRUE, XANTH! WE'RE APPROACHING --
--THE FRINGES OF A BLACK HOLE!
NO --! WE CAN'T LET IT GET AWAY, SHAREEN! NOT NOW -- NOT AFTER SO LONG!
WE MUST GO AFTER IT -- WREST IT FROM THE GRAVITY WELL -- USE OUR SHIP'S POWER TO PULL AWAY FROM THE BLACK HOLE!
WE CAN'T, XANTH! EVEN WITHOUT THE DERELICT CRAFT'S ADDED MASS, WE MIGHT NOT HAVE ENOUGH POWER TO PULL AWAY OURSELVES!
THE COMPUTER POSITS DANGER AT --
I DON'T CARE ABOUT THE DANGER, SHAREEN!
WE'VE DEVOTED OUR LIVES TO THIS TASK!
WE'RE GOING AFTER THAT SHIP! WE'RE GOING INTO THE BLACK HOLE!


"THERE WAS ONLY ONE FAULT WITH XANTH'S SELF-SACRIFICING DECISION...
"HE HAD ALSO SEALED THE FATE OF HIS CO-COMMANDER... AND LOVER.
"THE BATTERED HULK WAS SUCKED INTO THE DENSE SWIRL OF THE BLACK HOLE'S PULL...
"... AND WHEN THE PURSUING CRAFT FOLLOWED INTO THAT DARK WELL OF UNIMAGINABLE FURY, BOTH CRAFTS INSTANTLY DISINTEGRATED.
"THE FLESH AND BLOOD THAT WAS XANTH AND SHAREEN SUFFERED A SIMILAR FATE--INDEED, WORSE, FOR THEY COULD FEEL.
"THE VAPORIZED ENERGIES OF SENTIENT LIFE AND DEAD MATTER FUSED AS THEY HURTLED ONWARD, DEEPER INTO THE BLACK HOLE'S PIPELINE--AND THERE WAS FIRE AND FROST, BLACKNESS AND BLINDING LIGHT...
"...THE ECSTASY OF AGONIES HELD FOR A FLICKERING MOMENT OF FOREVER.
"THE VAPORIZED LIFE-ENERGIES TASTED COLORS AND SAW SOUNDS, FELT STRANGE ODORS AND HEARD FROZEN VISIONS OF BURNING LIGHT. THEY ARRIVED AT THE HEART OF THE BLACK HOLE AND WERE MET BY SWIRLING ENERGY-BEINGS OF BLACK LIGHT.
"THESE BEINGS 'SPOKE' TO THE NEW MASS OF ARRIVING ENERGY, WHISPERING AND COOING AND BUZZING DEEP IN THE CONSCIOUSNESS--PERHAPS IN WELCOME, PASSING ON THE SECRETS OF ETERNITY... OR PERHAPS MERELY SEEKING TO INSTILL MADNESS...

"YES, MADNESS -- FOR THE ESSENCE OF THE TWO LOVERS, THEIR *LIFE-FORCES*, PERHAPS THEIR *SOULS*, STILL EXISTED..



"...AND THE ENERGY-BEINGS OF BLACK LIGHT INFUSED THEM, VIOLATED THEM WITH THEIR MADDENING, SOUNDLESS VOICES...

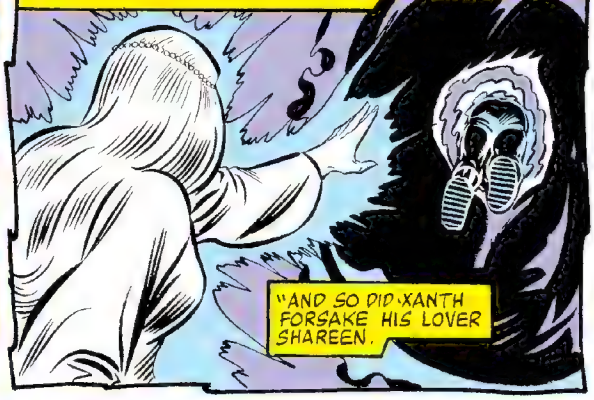
"THE LIFE-FORCE THAT HAD BEEN SHAREEN *LISTENED* TO THESE VOICES, ACCEPTING THEIR HISSING, CRACKLING MESSAGES OF BLISS AND MANIA...

"...AND SHE WAS REBORN, KNOWING A PEACE BEYOND PEACE.

"BUT THE LIFE-FORCE THAT HAD BEEN XANTH COULD NOT LISTEN, NOR COMPREHEND, AND SO HE TOOK ON ONLY THE *DARKER* ASPECTS OF THE BLACK HOLE...

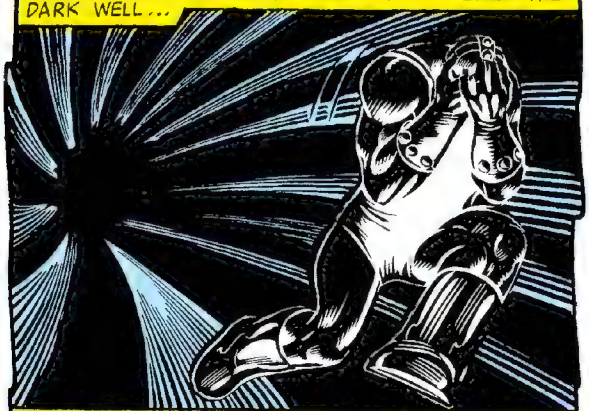
"THE VOICES OF THE LIGHT BEINGS HAD DRIVEN HIM *MAD*. AND SO, REJECTING THE VOICES OF ALIEN LIFE -- PRECISELY WHAT HE HAD SOUGHT FOR FORTY YEARS -- HE FED ONLY ON THE DARKER ENERGIES AND WAS CONSUMED HIMSELF BY THE BLACKNESS; BODY, MIND, AND SOUL.

"HE FLED THE DARK LIGHT AT THE BLEEDING HEART AND FOUGHT HIS WAY TO THE FAR REACHES OF THE BLACK HOLE -- TO THE 'OPPOSITE END'...



"AND SO DID XANTH FORSAKE HIS LOVER SHAREEN.

"ALTHOUGH HE COULD NOT KNOW IT, HE EMERGED IN MADNESS FROM THE BLACK HOLE'S FAR SIDE -- INTO THE DIM PAST, AND UNIVERSES DISTANT FROM THE POINT IN SPACE WHERE HE HAD FIRST ENTERED THE DARK WELL...



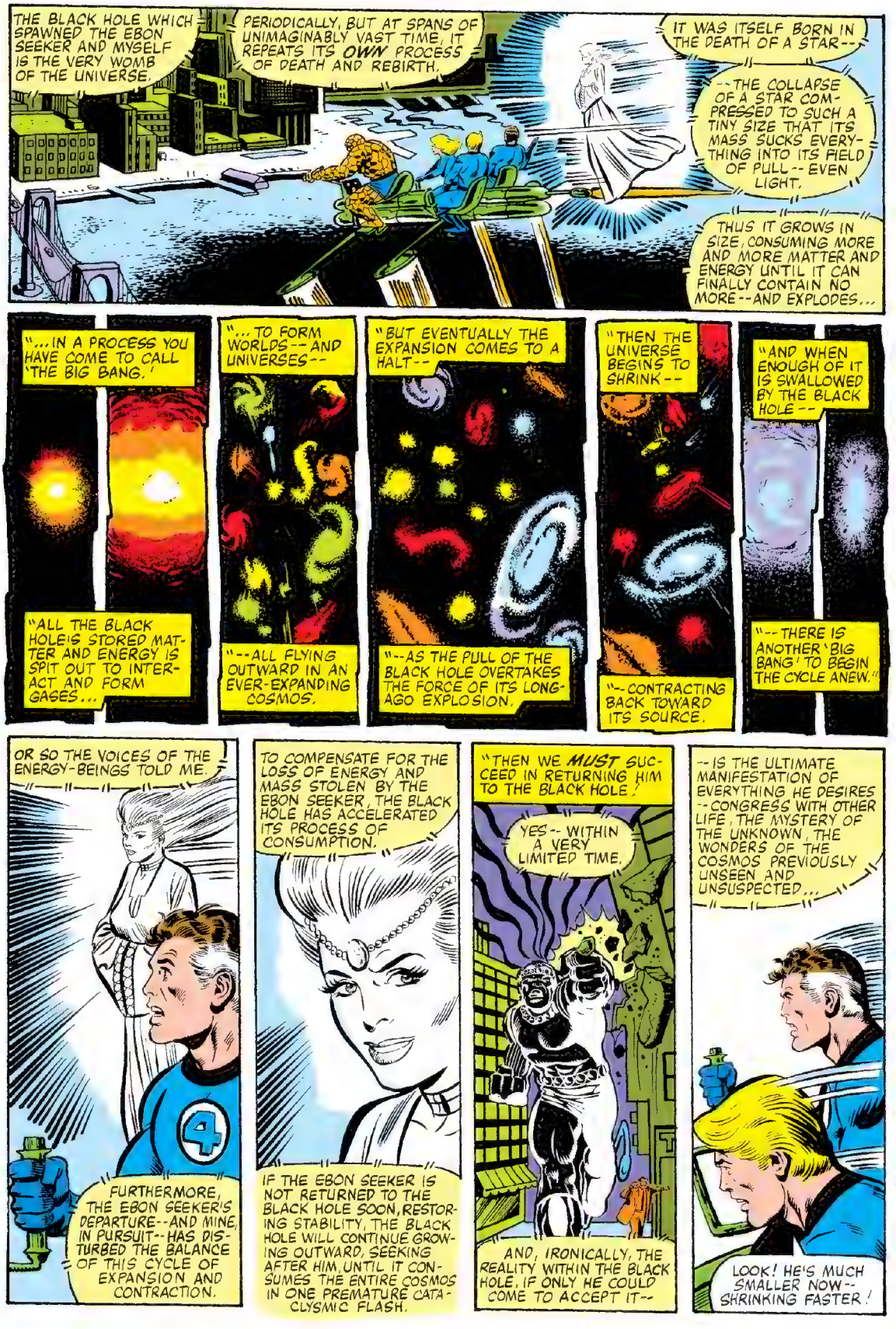
"THE BLACK HOLE WAS A WARP -- A TUNNEL -- THROUGH BOTH TIME AND SPACE.

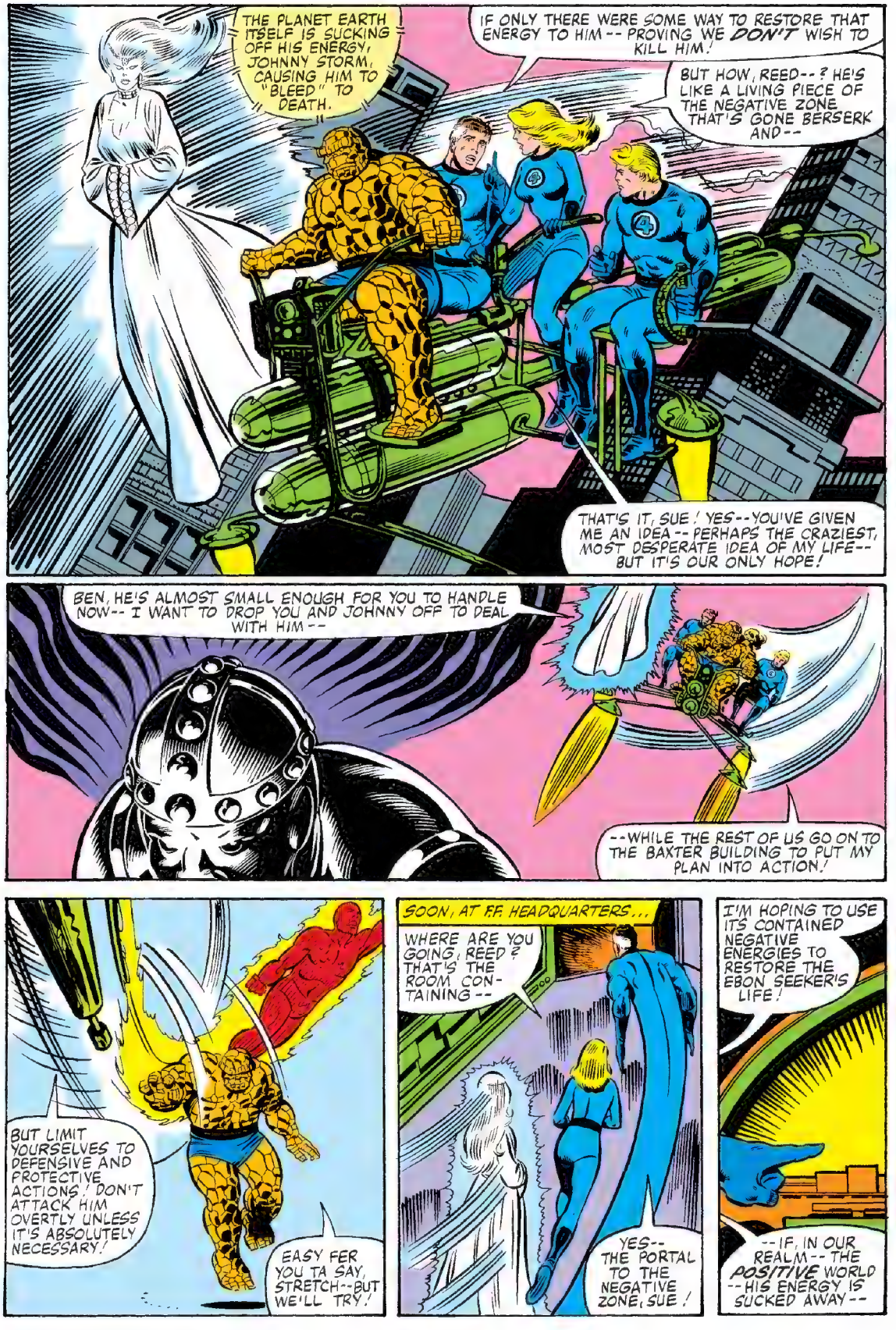
"MADDENED, HE MOVED ON WITH BUT ONE THOUGHT STIRRING HIS DARK SOUL -- TO COMPLETE HIS MISSION AT ANY COST...

"...TO FIND LIFE.

"BUT HE HAD BECOME LIKE UNTO A BLACK HOLE HIMSELF AND, UPON CONTACT WITH THAT FIRST PLANET, HIS ENERGY WAS PULLED OUTWARD--
"--TO BEGIN DESTROYING THE PLANET EVEN AS THE PLANET DESTROYED HIM BY SIPHONING OFF HIS VITAL, LETHAL ENERGIES.
"AND SO, UPON THE CATACLYSM OF HIS DEATH, HE DESTROYED HIS FIRST WORLD...
"... AND WAS THEN REBORN IN THE RELEASED ENERGIES OF DESTRUCTION...
"--TO CONTINUE SEEKING NEW LIFE IN THE EBON INFINITY ...TO REPEAT THE TRAGIC PROCESS ENDLESSLY...
"HIS LOVER PURSUED HIM ENDLESSLY, ATTEMPTING IN VAIN TO RESTORE HIS SANITY AND PUT AN END TO THE DESTRUCTION.
"BUT IT WAS NOT TO BE.
"XANTH AND SHAREEN HAD ENDED THEIR DESPERATE MISSION OF SALVATION FOR ALL ETERNITY."
SHAREEN, OF COURSE, WAS ME--AND XANTH IS NOW THE BEING KNOWN AS THE EBON SEEKER, MY FORMER LOVER GONE MAD.
ALMOST LISTLESSLY, FIREFROST BURNS AWAY THE DARKNESS.
FIREFROST, I... I AM AWED...
THE TALE YOU'VE JUST TOLD IS...
HEY! WE CAN SEE AGAIN--AN' THERE HE IS!
THE EBON SEEKER--HEADIN' BACK FER THE CITY!
YES, AND THE ENERGY BLEEDING FROM HIM IS ALMOST GONE.
SOON HE WILL DIE AND BE REBORN FROM THE ASHES OF YOUR PLANET'S DESTRUCTION.

THEN THERE'S NO TIME TO PONDER FIREFROST'S TALE! EVERYONE TO THE JET-CYCLE! WE'VE GOT TO STOP THE SEEKER!
THAT, REED RICHARDS, IS WHAT I HOPED YOUR INDOMITABLE SPIRIT WOULD FORCE YOU TO SAY, AND MOVE SWIFTLY NOW--
"--FOR HE WILL REACH YOUR CITY OF NEW YORK WITHIN INSTANTS."
LOOK OUT! RUN!!
WHAT THE--? BUT I THOUGHT IT WAS OVER! I THOUGHT HE WAS GONE!
--AND SO, AS THE SCIENTISTS OF THE WORLD CONVENE TO STUDY THE PROBLEM, AS A STATE OF EMERGENCY IS PROCLAIMED BY EVERY NATION ON EARTH, THE TERRIBLE TRUTH IS NOWHERE MORE APPARENT THAN HERE IN MANHATTAN...
THE DARK DESTROYER OF UNKNOWN ORIGIN HAS RETURNED IN NEW FURY!
AND HOW DOES A LESS TYPICAL OBSERVER REACT TO THE CHAOS--SOMEONE, SAY, LIKE THE GOLDEN AVENGER KNOWN AS IRON MAN--?
SO THE DARK GIANT HAS RETURNED--AND MORE DEVASTATING THAN EVER.
GOOD THING I WAS ALREADY ON MY WAY TO AVENGERS MANSION...
I KNOW THE FANTASTIC FOUR ARE ALREADY INVOLVED IN THIS--
--BUT IT CERTAINLY WON'T HURT TO MUSTER THE OTHER AVENGERS AND GIVE THE F.F. A HELPING HAND.
MEANWHILE... KNOW, REED RICHARDS, THAT HE HAS DIED A THOUSAND TIMES A THOUSAND TIMES, DESTROYING A PLANET EACH TIME--
--ALLOWING HIM TO RE-INTEGRATE HIS LOST ENERGY AND BE REBORN...
YOU'RE IMPLYING THAT HE IS A LIVING BLACK HOLE HIMSELF--?
THE ENERGIES AND PROPERTIES OF THE BLACK HOLE HAVE BEEN ASSIMILATED BY HIS VERY BEING...
BUT THE FATE WE FACE IS FAR WORSE THAN THAT, REED RICHARDS, ALTHOUGH IT CAN SCARCELY MATTER TO YOU ON YOUR HUMAN SCALE.
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?


THE BLACK HOLE WHICH SPAWNED THE EBON SEEKER AND MYSELF IS THE VERY WOMB OF THE UNIVERSE.
PERIODICALLY, BUT AT SPANS OF UNIMAGINABLY VAST TIME, IT REPEATS ITS OWN PROCESS OF DEATH AND REBIRTH.
IT WAS ITSELF BORN IN THE DEATH OF A STAR--
--THE COLLAPSE OF A STAR COMPRESSED TO SUCH A TINY SIZE THAT ITS MASS SUCKS EVERYTHING INTO ITS FIELD OF PULL -- EVEN LIGHT.
THUS IT GROWS IN SIZE, CONSUMING MORE AND MORE MATTER AND ENERGY UNTIL IT CAN FINALLY CONTAIN NO MORE--AND EXPLODES...
"...IN A PROCESS YOU HAVE COME TO CALL 'THE BIG BANG.'
"ALL THE BLACK HOLE'S STORED MATTER AND ENERGY IS SPIT OUT TO INTERACT AND FORM GASES...
"... TO FORM WORLDS -- AND UNIVERSES--
"--ALL FLYING OUTWARD IN AN EVER-EXPANDING COSMOS.
"BUT EVENTUALLY THE EXPANSION COMES TO A HALT--
"--AS THE PULL OF THE BLACK HOLE OVERTAKES THE FORCE OF ITS LONG-AGO EXPLOSION.
"THEN THE UNIVERSE BEGINS TO SHRINK--
"--CONTRACTING BACK TOWARD ITS SOURCE.
"AND WHEN ENOUGH OF IT IS SWALLOWED BY THE BLACK HOLE--
"--THERE IS ANOTHER 'BIG BANG' TO BEGIN THE CYCLE ANEW."
OR SO THE VOICES OF THE ENERGY-BEINGS TOLD ME.
FURTHERMORE, THE EBON SEEKER'S DEPARTURE--AND MINE, IN PURSUIT--HAS DISTURBED THE BALANCE OF THIS CYCLE OF EXPANSION AND CONTRACTION.
TO COMPENSATE FOR THE LOSS OF ENERGY AND MASS STOLEN BY THE EBON SEEKER, THE BLACK HOLE HAS ACCELERATED ITS PROCESS OF CONSUMPTION.
IF THE EBON SEEKER IS NOT RETURNED TO THE BLACK HOLE SOON, RESTORING STABILITY, THE BLACK HOLE WILL CONTINUE GROWING OUTWARD, SEEKING AFTER HIM, UNTIL IT CONSUMES THE ENTIRE COSMOS IN ONE PREMATURE CATACLYSMIC FLASH.
"THEN WE MUST SUCCEED IN RETURNING HIM TO THE BLACK HOLE!
YES -- WITHIN A VERY LIMITED TIME.
AND, IRONICALLY, THE REALITY WITHIN THE BLACK HOLE, IF ONLY HE COULD COME TO ACCEPT IT--
--IS THE ULTIMATE MANIFESTATION OF EVERYTHING HE DESIRES --CONGRESS WITH OTHER LIFE, THE MYSTERY OF THE UNKNOWN, THE WONDERS OF THE COSMOS PREVIOUSLY UNSEEN AND UNSUSPECTED...
LOOK! HE'S MUCH SMALLER NOW-- SHRINKING FASTER!


THE PLANET EARTH ITSELF IS SUCKING OFF HIS ENERGY, JOHNNY STORM, CAUSING HIM TO "BLEED" TO DEATH.
IF ONLY THERE WERE SOME WAY TO RESTORE THAT ENERGY TO HIM -- PROVING WE DON'T WISH TO KILL HIM!
BUT HOW, REED--? HE'S LIKE A LIVING PIECE OF THE NEGATIVE ZONE THAT'S GONE BERSERK AND--
THAT'S IT, SUE! YES--YOU'VE GIVEN ME AN IDEA -- PERHAPS THE CRAZIEST, MOST DESPERATE IDEA OF MY LIFE-- BUT IT'S OUR ONLY HOPE!
BEN, HE'S ALMOST SMALL ENOUGH FOR YOU TO HANDLE NOW-- I WANT TO DROP YOU AND JOHNNY OFF TO DEAL WITH HIM--
--WHILE THE REST OF US GO ON TO THE BAXTER BUILDING TO PUT MY PLAN INTO ACTION!
BUT LIMIT YOURSELVES TO DEFENSIVE AND PROTECTIVE ACTIONS! DON'T ATTACK HIM OVERTLY UNLESS IT'S ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY!
EASY FER YOU TA SAY, STRETCH--BUT WE'LL TRY!
SOON, AT F.F. HEADQUARTERS...
WHERE ARE YOU GOING, REED? THAT'S THE ROOM CONTAINING--
YES-- THE PORTAL TO THE NEGATIVE ZONE, SUE!
I'M HOPING TO USE ITS CONTAINED NEGATIVE ENERGIES TO RESTORE THE EBON SEEKER'S LIFE!
--IF, IN OUR REALM -- THE POSITIVE WORLD --HIS ENERGY IS SUCKED AWAY--

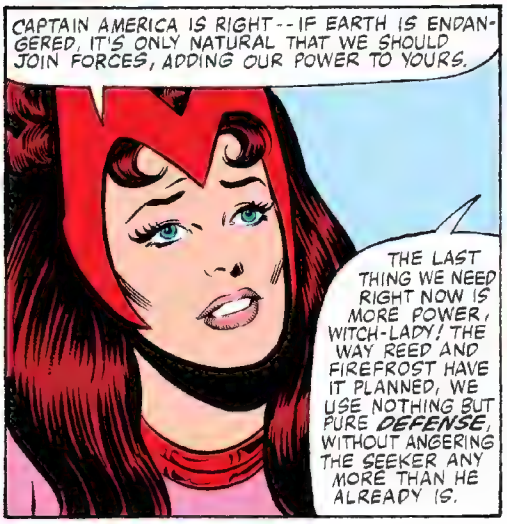
--THEN I'M HOPING THE OPPOSITE WILL HAPPEN IN THE NEGATIVE REALM.
IT'S A GAMBLE--AND FAILURE COULD MEAN INSTANTANEOUS DESTRUCTION OF EARTH AND THE NEGATIVE ZONE, AS EACH CANCELS THE OTHER OUT...
BELIEVE ME, REED RICHARDS, YOU HAVE NOTHING TO LOSE.
I KNOW, FIREFROST--I WOULDN'T RISK IT UNDER ANY OTHER CIRCUMSTANCES.
AND, OUT IN THE ERUPTING STREETS, UNDER OMINOUS BLACK STREAMERS GIRDING THE SKY...
HEADS UP PEOPLE. I'M GONNA VAPORIZE ALL THAT FLYING RUBBLE--BUT WATCH OUT FOR ANY STRAY DROPS OF MOLTEN RESIDUE!
FROOM
IT'S THE HUMAN TORCH!
YEAH--AND THE THING! BUT THE WAY THOSE BLACK LINES OF FORCE ARE RIPPIN' EVERYTHING APART--SENDIN' IT FLYING--EVEN THE THING CAN'T HOPE TO STOP HIM!
WHONG
SHEESH--SOME FAITH YOU CREEPS GOT!
A GUY BUILDS UP A REPUTATION IN THIS BURG FER YEARS--STOPPIN' EVERY SUPER-TYPE BAD GUY THAT BLOWS INTA TOWN--AND WHAT HAPPENS--?
EVERY TIME A NEW ONE HITS, YA AUTOMATICALLY DOUBT ME--AN' I GOTTA PROVE MY EVER-LOVIN' BLUE-EYED MUSCLE ALL OVER AGAIN!

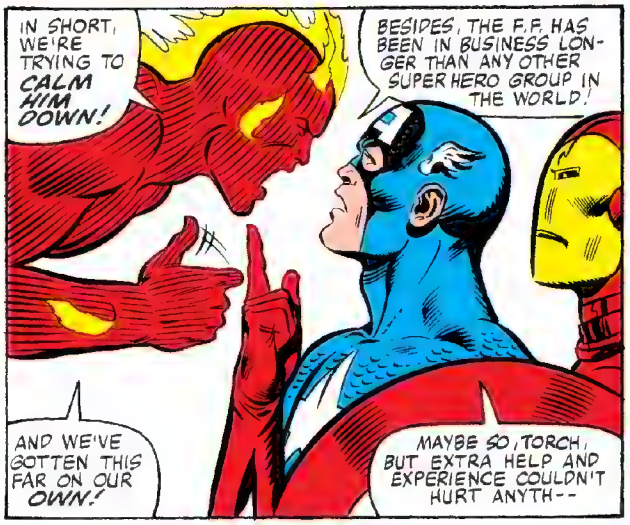
THE BAXTER BUILDING--
SUE--ENCLOSE THAT RHEOSTAT GENERATOR IN ONE OF YOUR FORCE-BUBBLES!
I'VE GOT TO BOMBARD IT WITH INDIRECT IONIZATION BEFORE I CAN ERECT A CONTAINING FIELD AROUND THE BAXTER BUILDING AND SURROUNDING AREA!
A "CONTAINING FIELD!" REED? WHAT FOR?
TO CONTAIN THE NEGATIVE ZONE WHEN I UNLOCK THE PORTAL AND LET IT FLOOD OUT TO CONSUME THE BAXTER BUILDING AND EVERYTHING ELSE IT CAN GET AT!
AND, AS MR. FANTASTIC FEVERISHLY PREPARES...
...TIME RUNS OUT ON THE STREETS.
C'MON, TORCHIE--HE'S BEELININ' FER THE EMPIRE STATE BUILDING! WE GOTTA STOP HIM!
I KNOW, BEN, BUT DON'T FORGET WHAT REED SAID--!
WE'RE NOT SUPPOSED TO ATTACK HIM OVERTLY...
US
IL
YEAH--IF WE CAN AVOID IT! AN' IF YA GOT ANY BRIGHT IDEAS ON AVOIDIN' IT, I'M ALL EARS. OTHERWISE--
--IT'S CLOBBERIN' TIME!!
SPOOM
AGAIN YOU ATTACK ME--SEEKING TO HASTEN THE PROCESS OF MY DESTRUCTION ALREADY BEGUN BY YOUR PLANET!
BUT YOUR EFFORT IS DOOMED TO FAILURE--FOR I CAN BE DESTROYED BY NOTHING LESS THAN THE DEATH OF YOUR ENTIRE PLANET AND ALL THE LIFE UPON IT!
UNFF! SOMEHOW, I KNEW YOU WUZ GONNA SAY SOMETHING LIKE THAT!

JUST A FEW LAST FINE-TUNING ADJUSTMENTS...
BUT WILL IT WORK, REED?
THERE'S ONLY ONE WAY TO FIND OUT, DARLING -- I'VE GOT TO TEST IT.
VERY WELL... I HAVE FAITH IN YOU, REED.
AS HAVE I.
IT'S NOT TO LATE, SUE -- YOU COULD STILL LEAVE NOW -- GET BEYOND THE INTENDED BOUNDARIES OF MY CONTAINED FIELD -- GO TO ALICIA'S PLACE AND WAIT IT OUT WITH OUR SON FRANKLIN...
NO, REED.
MY PLACE IS WITH YOU -- AS IT'S ALWAYS BEEN -- AS IT ALWAYS WILL BE...
BUT UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES, REED, IF YOU COULD JUST GIVE ME ENOUGH TIME TO CALL ALICIA'S...
...TO... TO SAY... GOODBYE...
OF COURSE.
NO MORE TIME FER FOOLIN' AROUND, TORCHIE -- I'M GETTIN' BUSHED -- DON'T KNOW HOW MUCH LONGER I CAN SLUG IT OUT WITH HIM...
FLY AHEAD AN' SEE IF STRETCHO'S PLAN IS READY, WILLYA?
BUT I CAN'T LEAVE YOU NOW, BEN! IF --
DO WHAT I SAY, JOHNNY -- BEFORE YA MAKE ME MAD!
ALL RIGHT, IF YOU SAY SO, BEN. HANG IN THERE, OLD BUDDY, AND --
ARRGH-H!
JUST GO, BLAST IT!!

AND GO THE TORCH DOES, BLAZING INTO THE BAXTER BUILDING AT TOP SPEED...
REED, YOU'VE GOTTA DO SOMETHING FAST! BEN HAD TO CLOSE WITH THE SEEKER!
THE FIGHT'S MOVING THIS WAY!
THEY SHOULD BE PUNCHING EACH OTHER INTO THE VICINITY OF THE BAXTER BUILDING ANY MINUTE!
THEN IT'S TIME TO ACTIVATE MY CONTAINED FIELD NOW!
TO THE WINDOW, JOHNNY--LET'S SEE IF IT WORKED!
YES-- ONCE THE NEGATIVE ZONE FILLS THIS CONTAINED AREA, THE REGION BEYOND SHOULD BE PROTECTED FROM THE ANTI-MATTER EFFECT!
I CAN OPEN THE PORTAL NOW WITHOUT FEAR OF MANHATTAN'S POSITIVE MATTER CLASHING AND EXPLODING WITH THE NEGATIVE ZONE'S ANTI-MATTER AND--
OH NO! LOOK OVER ON THAT ROOFTOP--!
THE AVENGERS! NOT NOW--NOT WHEN WE'RE SO CLOSE--NOT BEFORE WE'VE HAD A CHANCE TO TRY IT!!
AYE, 'TIS CLEAR EVEN TO THE EYES OF A WARRIOR LIKE THOR--THE ONE CALLED THE THING IS IN NEED OF OUR AID!
JOHNNY, YOU'VE GOT TO STOP THEM FROM FURTHER PROVOKING THE EBON SEEKER!
I'M ON MY WAY, REED!
ALL RIGHT, AVENGERS, LET'S GET DOWN THERE BEFORE--
WHAT THE--?! THE HUMAN TORCH--ATTACKING US WITH FIREBALLS! BUT WHY--?!

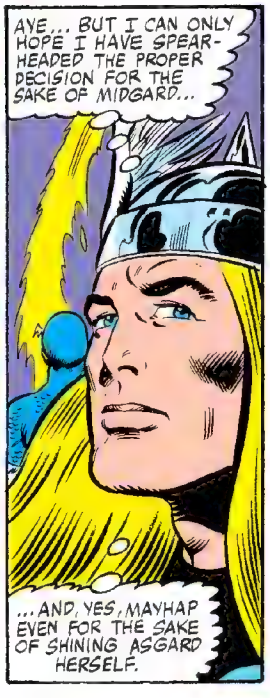
BUG OFF, KIDDIES -- THE FANTASTIC FOUR ARE HANDLING THE SITUATION!
SO WE SEE -- AND DOING A TERRIFIC JOB, AREN'T YOU?
I CAN ONLY CONCUR WITH THE BEAST'S INVERTED SENTIMENT, TORCH.
EASY, TORCH -- THIS IS NO TIME FOR VAIN PRIDE!

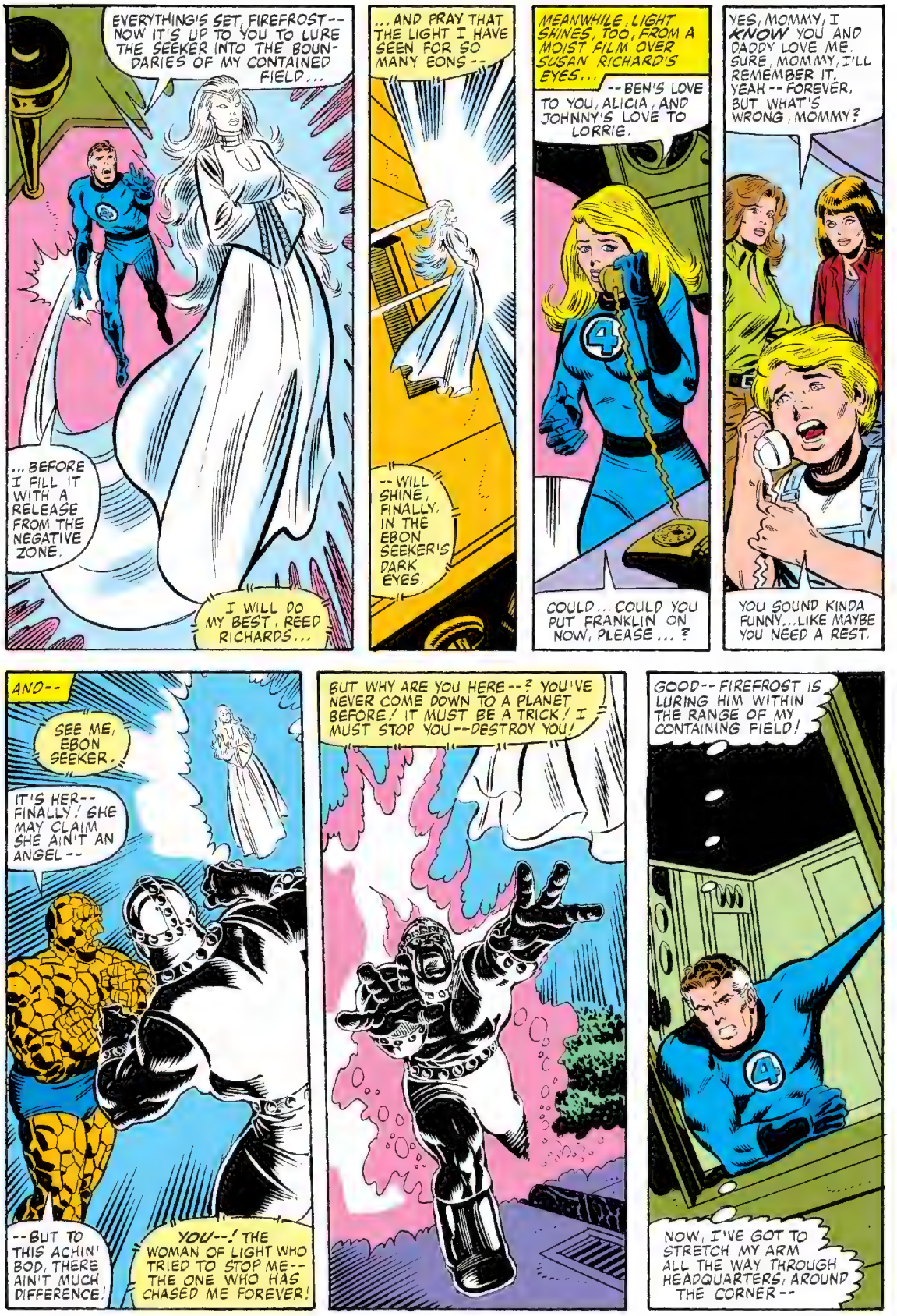

CAPTAIN AMERICA IS RIGHT -- IF EARTH IS ENDANGERED, IT'S ONLY NATURAL THAT WE SHOULD JOIN FORCES, ADDING OUR POWER TO YOURS.
THE LAST THING WE NEED RIGHT NOW IS MORE POWER, WITCH-LADY! THE WAY REED AND FIREFROST HAVE IT PLANNED, WE USE NOTHING BUT PURE DEFENSE, WITHOUT ANGERING THE SEEKER ANY MORE THAN HE ALREADY IS.

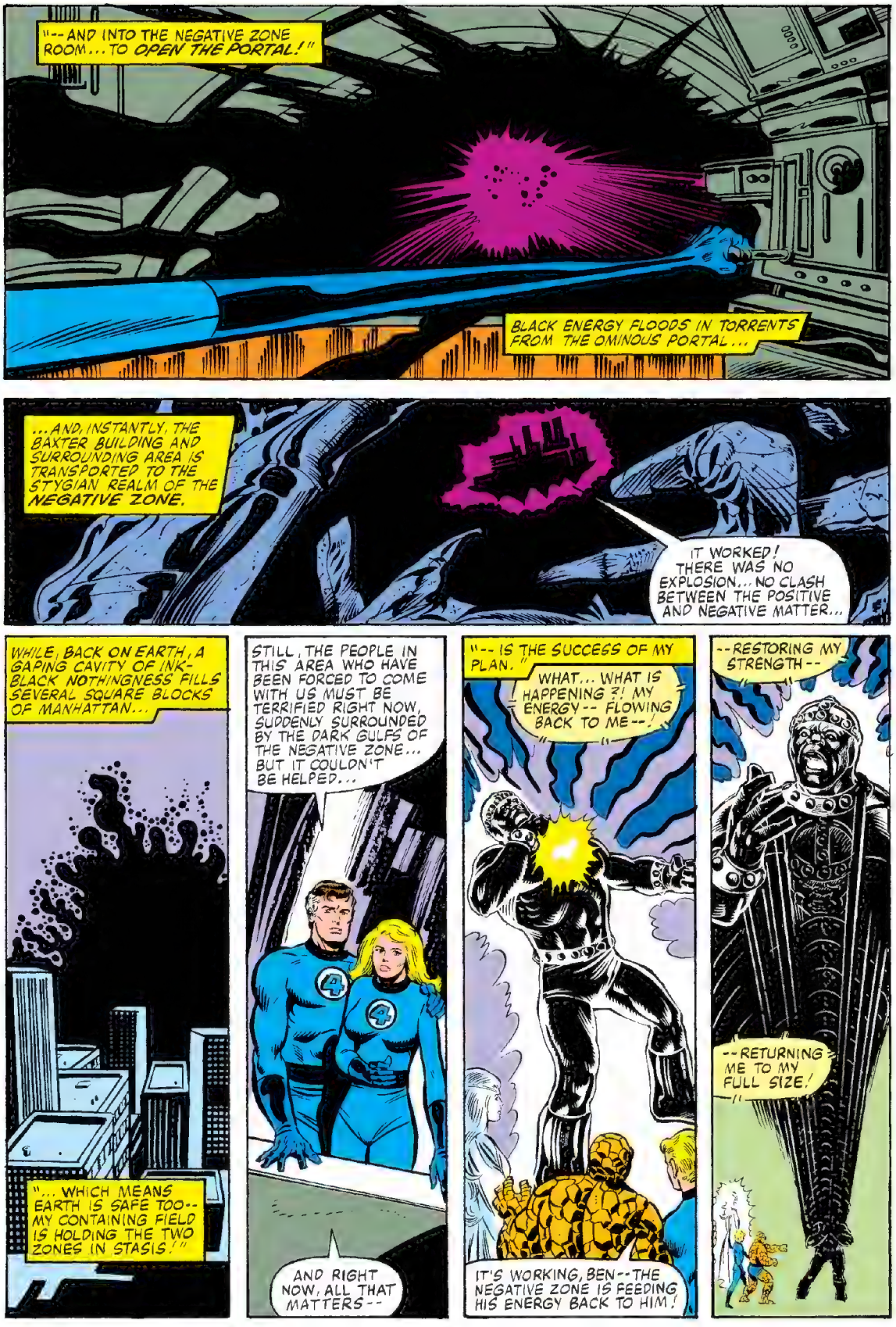

IN SHORT, WE'RE TRYING TO CALM HIM DOWN!
BESIDES, THE F.F. HAS BEEN IN BUSINESS LONGER THAN ANY OTHER SUPER HERO GROUP IN THE WORLD!
AND WE'VE GOTTEN THIS FAR ON OUR OWN!
MAYBE SO, TORCH, BUT EXTRA HELP AND EXPERIENCE COULDN'T HURT ANYTH--

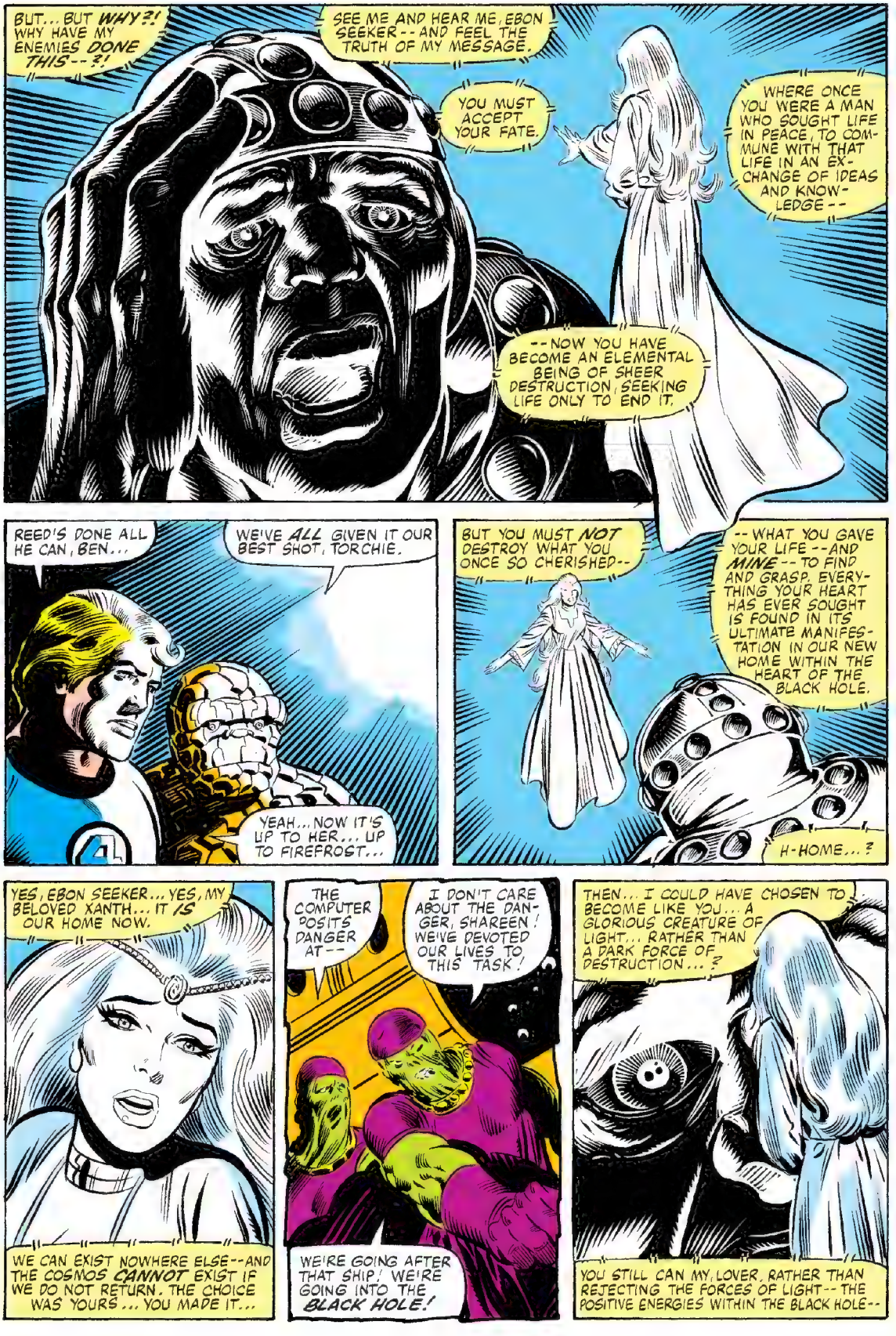
WE DON'T NEED YOUR HELP!
AS FOR EXPERIENCE, WE'VE HAD ENOUGH TO CHANGE YOUR DIAPERS ANY DAY OF THE --
THE YOUTH EXAGGERATES, BUT MAYHAP THERE IS STILL WISDOM IN HIS WORDS. THOR SAYS THE FANTASTIC FOUR SHOULD BE GIVEN A CHANCE TO CARRY OUT THEIR PLAN WITHOUT INTERFERENCE...

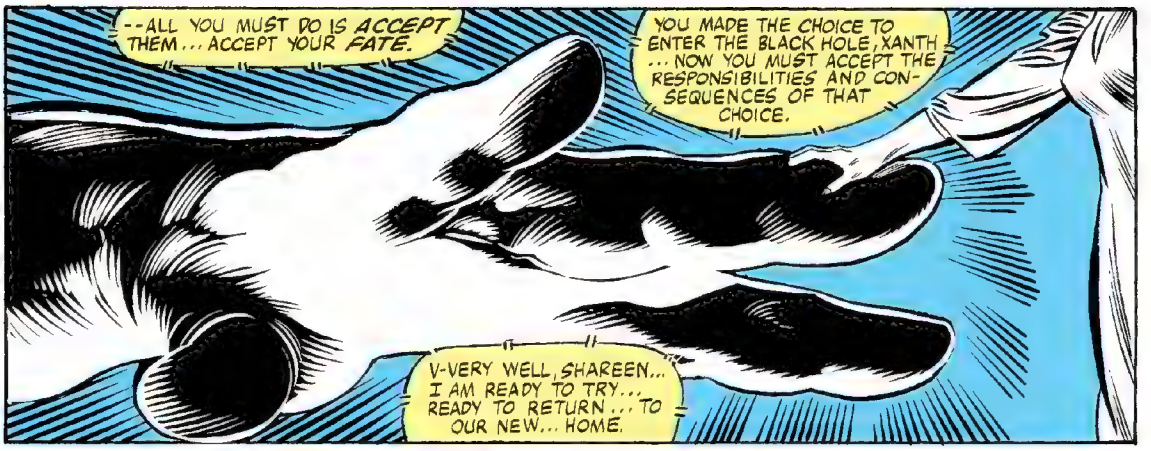
... UNTIL THAT PLAN SHOULD FAIL, THEN, AND ONLY THEN, SHALL THE AVENGERS INTERVENE IN THE MATTER.
THANKS FOR NOTHING, GOLDILOCKS -- BUT AT LEAST YOU'VE GOT A COOLER HEAD THAN YOUR COMPADRES...

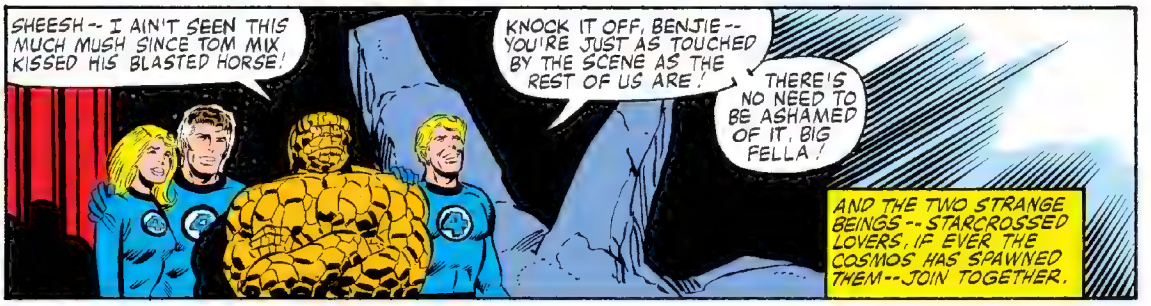

AYE... BUT I CAN ONLY HOPE I HAVE SPEAR-HEADED THE PROPER DECISION FOR THE SAKE OF MIDGARD...
...AND, YES, MAYHAP EVEN FOR THE SAKE OF SHINING ASGARD HERSELF.


EVERYTHING'S SET, FIREFROST--NOW IT'S UP TO YOU TO LURE THE SEEKER INTO THE BOUNDARIES OF MY CONTAINED FIELD...
...BEFORE I FILL IT WITH A RELEASE FROM THE NEGATIVE ZONE.
I WILL DO MY BEST, REED RICHARDS...
...AND PRAY THAT THE LIGHT I HAVE SEEN FOR SO MANY EONS--
--WILL SHINE, FINALLY, IN THE EBON SEEKER'S DARK EYES.
MEANWHILE, LIGHT SHINES, TOO, FROM A MOIST FILM OVER SUSAN RICHARD'S EYES...
--BEN'S LOVE TO YOU, ALICIA, AND JOHNNY'S LOVE TO LORRIE.
COULD... COULD YOU PUT FRANKLIN ON NOW, PLEASE...?
YES, MOMMY, I KNOW YOU AND DADDY LOVE ME. SURE, MOMMY, I'LL REMEMBER IT. YEAH--FOREVER. BUT WHAT'S WRONG, MOMMY?
YOU SOUND KINDA FUNNY...LIKE MAYBE YOU NEED A REST.
AND--
SEE ME, EBON SEEKER.
IT'S HER--FINALLY! SHE MAY CLAIM SHE AIN'T AN ANGEL--
--BUT TO THIS ACHIN' BOD, THERE AIN'T MUCH DIFFERENCE!
YOU--! THE WOMAN OF LIGHT WHO TRIED TO STOP ME--THE ONE WHO HAS CHASED ME FOREVER!
BUT WHY ARE YOU HERE--? YOU'VE NEVER COME DOWN TO A PLANET BEFORE! IT MUST BE A TRICK! I MUST STOP YOU--DESTROY YOU!
GOOD--FIREFROST IS LURING HIM WITHIN THE RANGE OF MY CONTAINING FIELD!
NOW, I'VE GOT TO STRETCH MY ARM ALL THE WAY THROUGH HEADQUARTERS, AROUND THE CORNER--

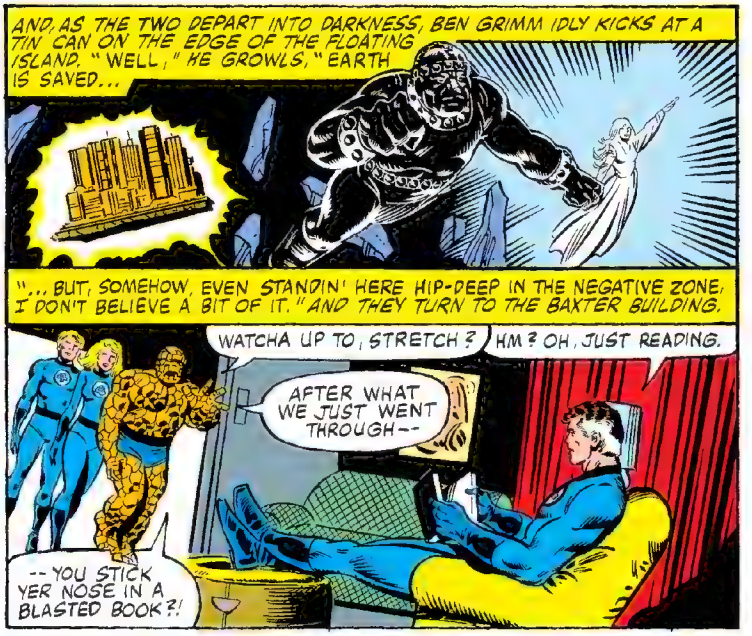

"--AND INTO THE NEGATIVE ZONE ROOM... TO OPEN THE PORTAL!"
BLACK ENERGY FLOODS IN TORRENTS FROM THE OMINOUS PORTAL...
...AND, INSTANTLY, THE BAXTER BUILDING AND SURROUNDING AREA IS TRANSPORTED TO THE STYGIAN REALM OF THE NEGATIVE ZONE.
IT WORKED! THERE WAS NO EXPLOSION... NO CLASH BETWEEN THE POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE MATTER...
WHILE, BACK ON EARTH, A GAPING CAVITY OF INK-BLACK NOTHINGNESS FILLS SEVERAL SQUARE BLOCKS OF MANHATTAN...
"... WHICH MEANS EARTH IS SAFE TOO-- MY CONTAINING FIELD IS HOLDING THE TWO ZONES IN STASIS!"
STILL, THE PEOPLE IN THIS AREA WHO HAVE BEEN FORCED TO COME WITH US MUST BE TERRIFIED RIGHT NOW, SUDDENLY SURROUNDED BY THE DARK GULFS OF THE NEGATIVE ZONE... BUT IT COULDN'T BE HELPED...
AND RIGHT NOW, ALL THAT MATTERS--
"-- IS THE SUCCESS OF MY PLAN."
WHAT... WHAT IS HAPPENING?! MY ENERGY-- FLOWING BACK TO ME--!
IT'S WORKING, BEN-- THE NEGATIVE ZONE IS FEEDING HIS ENERGY BACK TO HIM!
--RESTORING MY STRENGTH--
--RETURNING ME TO MY FULL SIZE!


BUT... BUT WHY?! WHY HAVE MY ENEMIES DONE THIS--?!
SEE ME AND HEAR ME, EBON SEEKER--AND FEEL THE TRUTH OF MY MESSAGE.
YOU MUST ACCEPT YOUR FATE.
WHERE ONCE YOU WERE A MAN WHO SOUGHT LIFE IN PEACE, TO COMMUNE WITH THAT LIFE IN AN EXCHANGE OF IDEAS AND KNOWLEDGE--
--NOW YOU HAVE BECOME AN ELEMENTAL BEING OF SHEER DESTRUCTION, SEEKING LIFE ONLY TO END IT.
REED'S DONE ALL HE CAN, BEN...
WE'VE ALL GIVEN IT OUR BEST SHOT, TORCHIE.
YEAH... NOW IT'S UP TO HER... UP TO FIREFROST...
BUT YOU MUST NOT DESTROY WHAT YOU ONCE SO CHERISHED--
--WHAT YOU GAVE YOUR LIFE--AND MINE--TO FIND AND GRASP. EVERYTHING YOUR HEART HAS EVER SOUGHT IS FOUND IN ITS ULTIMATE MANIFESTATION IN OUR NEW HOME WITHIN THE HEART OF THE BLACK HOLE.
H-HOME...?
YES, EBON SEEKER... YES, MY BELOVED XANTH... IT IS OUR HOME NOW.
WE CAN EXIST NOWHERE ELSE--AND THE COSMOS CANNOT EXIST IF WE DO NOT RETURN. THE CHOICE WAS YOURS... YOU MADE IT...
THE COMPUTER POSITS DANGER AT--
I DON'T CARE ABOUT THE DANGER, SHAREEN! WE'VE DEVOTED OUR LIVES TO THIS TASK!
WE'RE GOING AFTER THAT SHIP! WE'RE GOING INTO THE BLACK HOLE!
THEN... I COULD HAVE CHOSEN TO BECOME LIKE YOU... A GLORIOUS CREATURE OF LIGHT... RATHER THAN A DARK FORCE OF DESTRUCTION...?
YOU STILL CAN MY LOVER. RATHER THAN REJECTING THE FORCES OF LIGHT--THE POSITIVE ENERGIES WITHIN THE BLACK HOLE--


--ALL YOU MUST DO IS ACCEPT THEM... ACCEPT YOUR FATE.
YOU MADE THE CHOICE TO ENTER THE BLACK HOLE, XANTH ... NOW YOU MUST ACCEPT THE RESPONSIBILITIES AND CONSEQUENCES OF THAT CHOICE.
V-VERY WELL, SHAREEN... I AM READY TO TRY... READY TO RETURN... TO OUR NEW... HOME.


SHEESH -- I AIN'T SEEN THIS MUCH MUSH SINCE TOM MIX KISSED HIS BLASTED HORSE!
KNOCK IT OFF, BENJIE -- YOU'RE JUST AS TOUCHED BY THE SCENE AS THE REST OF US ARE!
THERE'S NO NEED TO BE ASHAMED OF IT, BIG FELLA!
AND THE TWO STRANGE BEINGS -- STARCROSSED LOVERS, IF EVER THE COSMOS HAS SPAWNED THEM -- JOIN TOGETHER.

LATER...
DO NOT WORRY, REED RICHARDS, WE WILL FIND OUR WAY HOME.
INDEED, THE NEGATIVE ZONE CONTAINS A DIRECT CONDUIT TO THE VERY HEART OF THE BLACK HOLE... IF ONE KNOWS HOW TO FOLLOW THAT CONDUIT.
IF ANYONE KNOWS, FIRE-FROST, YOU DO.


AND, AS THE TWO DEPART INTO DARKNESS, BEN GRIMM IDLY KICKS AT A TIN CAN ON THE EDGE OF THE FLOATING ISLAND. "WELL," HE GROWLS, "EARTH IS SAVED...
"... BUT, SOMEHOW, EVEN STANDIN' HERE HIP-DEEP IN THE NEGATIVE ZONE, I DON'T BELIEVE A BIT OF IT." AND THEY TURN TO THE BAXTER BUILDING.
WATCHA UP TO, STRETCH?
HM? OH, JUST READING.
AFTER WHAT WE JUST WENT THROUGH --
-- YOU STICK YER NOSE IN A BLASTED BOOK?!

YES, REED, IT'S NOT LIKE YOU TO DISMISS THE WONDER OF WHAT WE'VE JUST WITNESSED.
BUT I AM THINKING ABOUT IT, SUE. FOR EXAMPLE --

"--IN 1977, THE UNITED STATES--ON BEHALF OF ALL MANKIND--LAUNCHED THE TWO INTERPLANETARY PROBES CALLED VOYAGER.

"THEIR INITIAL FUNCTION WAS TO PASS AND EXPLORE IN SEQUENCE, THE OUTER PLANETS FROM JUPITER TO URANUS, TRANSMITTING DATA BACK TO TRACKING STATIONS HERE ON EARTH.

"ALTHOUGH THEY'VE ONLY COMPLETED A PORTION OF THEIR SEVEN YEAR TOUR, OUR COSMOLOGISTS WILL BE BUSY ANALYZING THE DATA FOR YEARS.

"EVENTUALLY, IN 1986, THEY WILL COMPLETE THEIR PROGRAMMED DUTIES AND SWING BEYOND THE SOLAR SYSTEM INTO INTERSTELLAR SPACE--

"--THERE TO DRIFT THROUGH THE VAST, DARK REACHES POSSIBLY FOREVER.

"HOWEVER, THE SCIENTISTS WHO BRAINSTORMED AND ENGINEERED THE VOYAGER PROJECT WERE UNDERSTANDABLY RELUCTANT TO SEE SUCH MAGNIFICENT CONSTRUCTS GO TO WASTE FROM THAT POINT ON...

"SO, ON THE BILLION TO ONE CHANCE THAT SOMEDAY IN THE FUTURE SOMEONE WILL SOMEWHERE DETECT AND INVESTIGATE THE CRAFT, NASA BUILT IN A HOST OF INFORMATIONAL FEATURES--

"--A MATHEMATICAL LANGUAGE BASED ON THE BINARY SYSTEM, DIAGRAMS AND PICTURES OF THE EARTH AND ITS INHABITANTS--

"--EVEN A COPPER PHONOGRAPH RECORDING OF GREETINGS SPOKEN IN FIFTY-FOUR EARTH LANGUAGES--

"--AS WELL AS A COLLECTION OF MUSICAL PIECES RANGING FROM CLASSICAL TO ROCK AND ROLL, FROM AFRICAN TRIBAL DANCES TO THE FORLORN SONGS OF THE WHALES...

"...ALL THIS WAS JUST TO LET SOMEONE OUT THERE--ANYONE OUT THERE--KNOW THAT WE HAD EXISTED, THAT WE HAD DONE THIS AWESOME THING OF LAUNCHING SPACECRAFT INTO THE FACE OF THE UNKNOWN. INTO THE HEART OF INFINITY."

CARL SAGAN COMPILED A BOOK ABOUT IT--THAT'S WHAT I'VE BEEN READING.

MURMURS OF EARTH

CARL SAGAN

SO? I DON'T GET IT. STRETCH.

VOYAGER MAY BE THE CAT'S MEOW, BUT WHAT'S IT GOT TO DO WITH WHAT JUST HAPPENED?
--VAST DISTANCES FROM EARTH, ON THE FRINGES OF A BLACK HOLE.
MURMURS OF EARTH
YEAH. SO WHAT?
FIREFROST AND THE EBON SEEKER DISCOVERED THE BATTERED HULK OF A SPACECRAFT, EONS FROM NOW IN THE FUTURE--
SO... EONS FROM NOW, VAST DISTANCES FROM ITS POINT OF ORIGIN --
--ONE OF THE VOYAGER PROBES MAY VERY WELL DRIFT INTO THE EVENT HORIZON OF A --
A BLACK HOLE!
AND... AND YOU THINK WHAT THEY FOUND WAS... ?
IT COULD HAVE BEEN, SUE... AND PERHAPS, JUST PERHAPS, THAT'S ALL THAT COUNTS. IT'S SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT AS WE SAY GOODBYE TO THEM...
"FAREWELL, FIREFROST AND EBON SEEKER. MAY YOUR JOURNEY HOME BE A SAFE ONE...
"AND REMEMBER KINDLY THESE WORDS FROM THOSE WHO-- IN A SIMPLE DESIRE TO SHOUT "WE EXIST! WE HAVE ACHIEVED!" --MAY HAVE CREATED YOU!"
THE VERY THOUGHT OF IT, REED... IT SENDS A CHILL THROUGH ME. IT'S SO ... BEAUTIFUL... AND YET SO FRIGHTENING.
YEAH, I GOTTA ADMIT... FER ONCE, EVEN I'M ALMOST AT A LOSS FER WORDS...
EXCEPT FER ONE LAST QUESTION... WHEN ARE YA GONNA GET US OUTTA HERE AN' BACK TA NORMAL --BACK TA EARTH?
THAT'S JUST IT, BEN ...I DON'T KNOW.
WHAT-- ?!
THAT'S RIGHT, JOHNNY-- WE MAY HAVE MANAGED TO SAVE THE EARTH, BUT...
... HEAVEN HELP US... WE'RE STUCK HERE... TRAPPED IN THE NEGATIVE ZONE...
... PERHAPS FOREVER.
NEXT: IN ALL THE GATHERED GLOOM...

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NIGHTMARE IN THE NEGATIVE ZONE!

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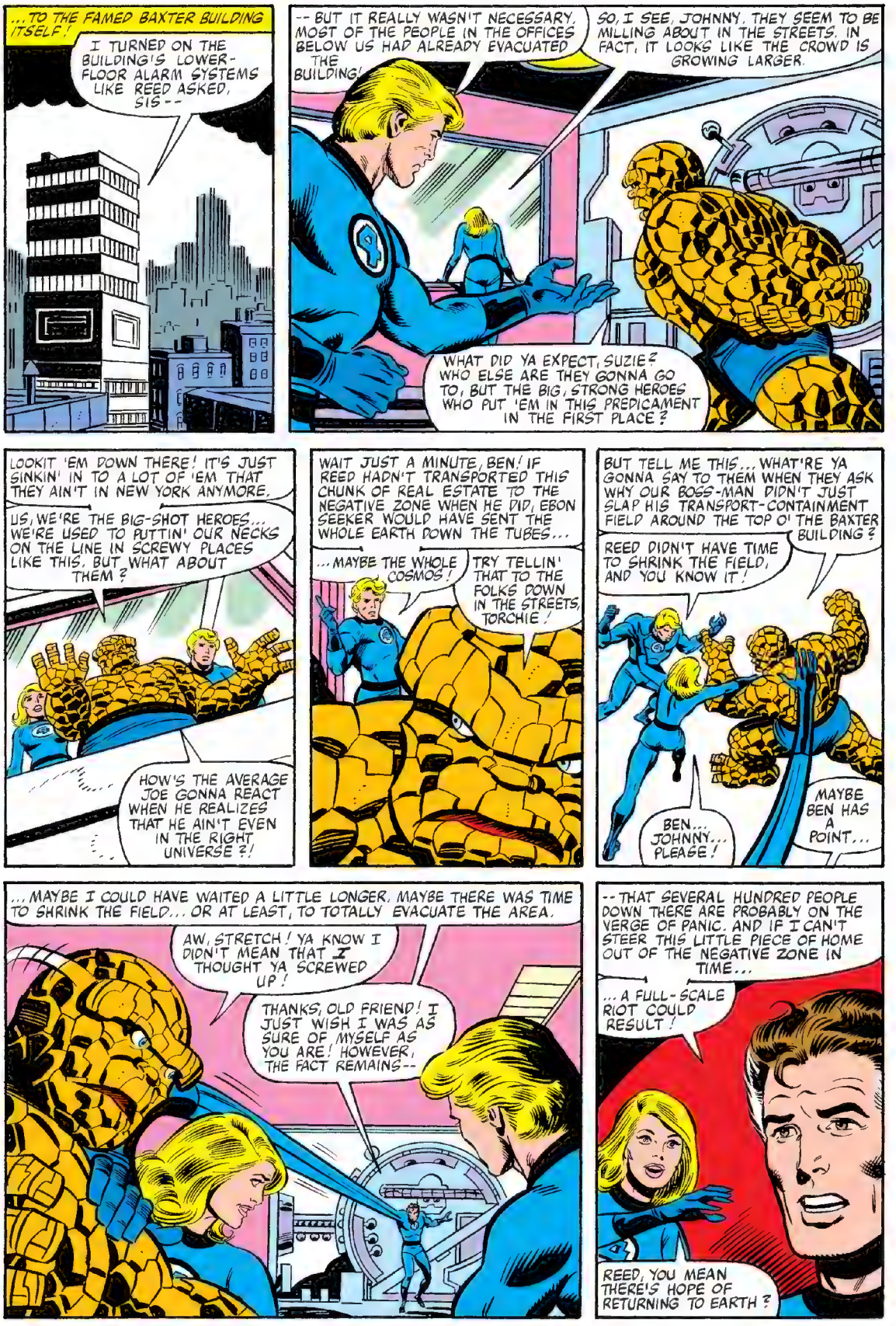
Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE FANTASTIC FOUR!®

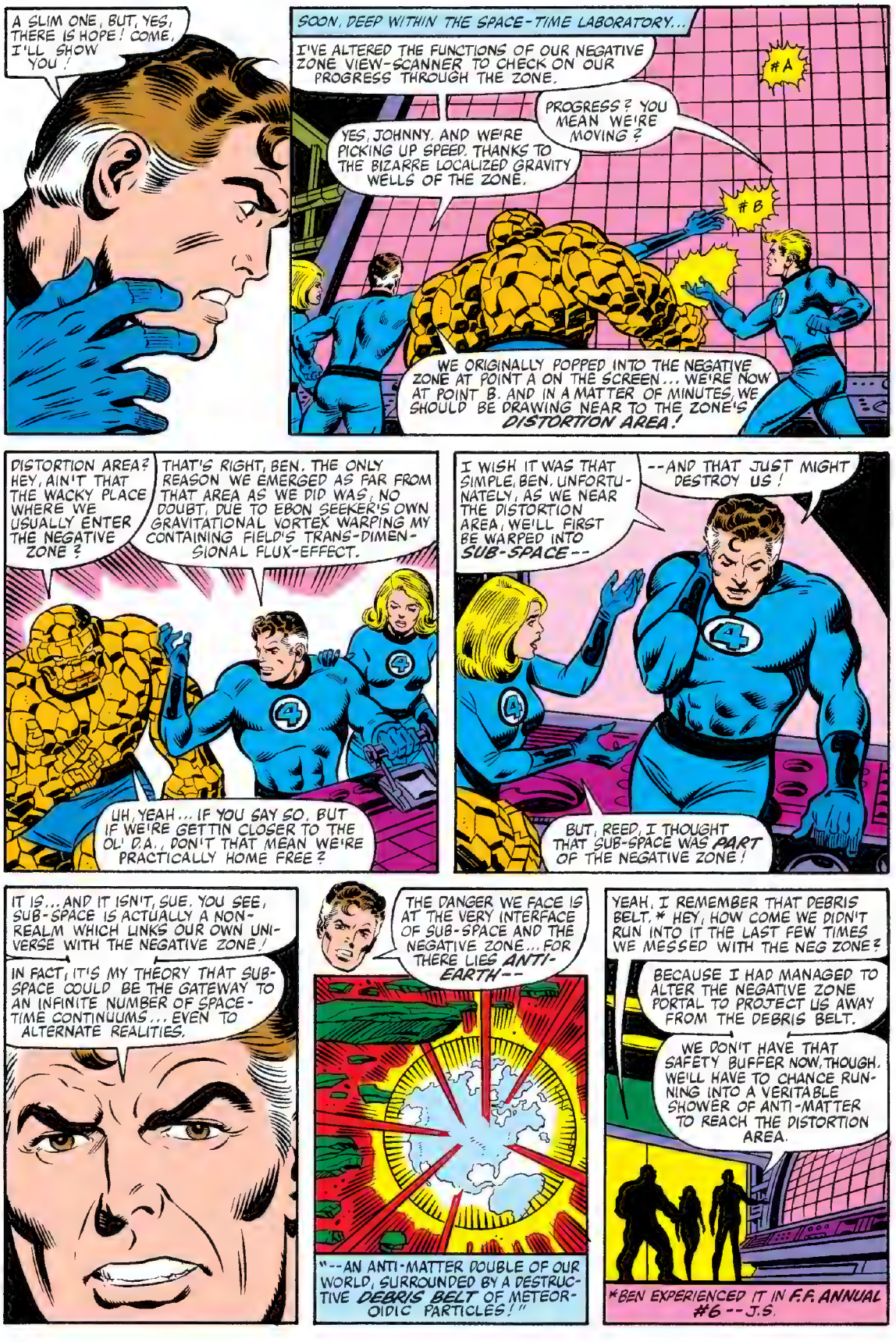
IN ALL THE GATHERED GLOOM!

THE INTERSTELLAR MENACE KNOWN AS THE EBON SEEKER HAS BEEN DEFEATED BY THE FANTASTIC FOUR... BUT AT A TERRIBLE PRICE!
IN ENDING EBON SEEKER'S THREAT, THE F.F.'S BAXTER BUILDING HEADQUARTERS --AND SEVERAL BLOCKS OF MIDTOWN MANHATTAN AROUND IT-- HAVE BEEN TRANSPORTED TO THAT EXTRA-DIMENSIONAL REALM, THE NEGATIVE ZONE!... PERHAPS, FOR ALL TIME!
AN NOW-- TO MAKE MATTERS WORSE-- ACROSS THE EERIE VOID, AN AWFUL VOICE RINGS OUT...
I SENSE THAT A MASSIVE CHUNK OF POSITIVE MATTER IS INVADING MY DOMAIN! WHOEVER IS RESPONSIBLE MUST DIE!
SO SWEARS, STYGORR!

MOENCH & GURLAND — WRITERS
SIENKIEWICZ, SINNOTT, & MOORE — ARTISTS
JIM NOVAK — LETTERER
GEORGE ROUSSOS — COLORIST
SALICRUP & SHOOTER — EDITORIAL ACES

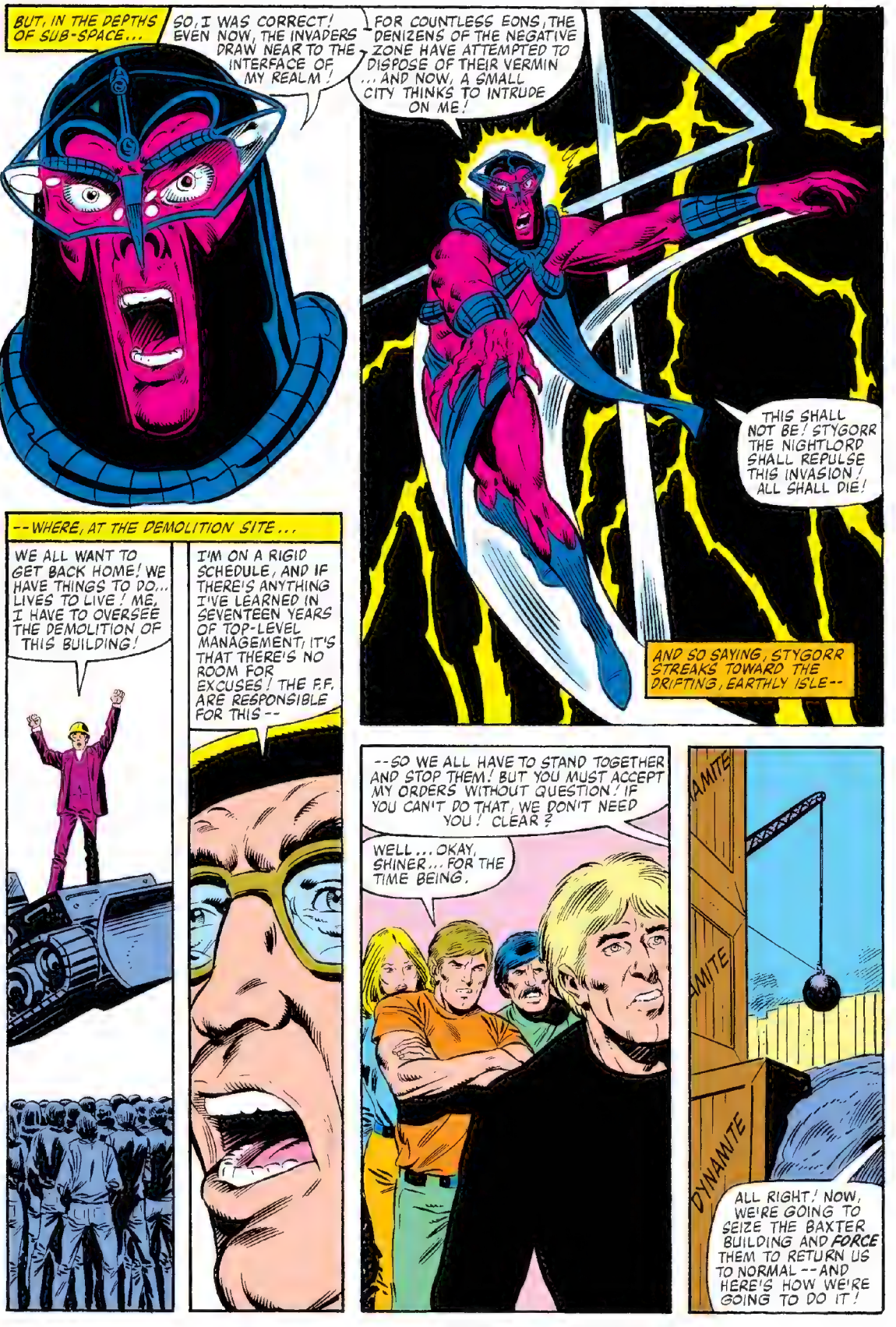
THE DENIZENS OF THE LITTLE CHUNK OF EARTH REACT...
WHAT THE--? WE'RE SURROUNDED BY SOME KIND OF BLACKNESS--LIKE...LIKE... OUTER SPACE!
SHOE SHINE
YEAH! AND SOME KIND OF CRACKLIN' FORCE-FIELD!
C'MON, MISTER! WE GOTTA FIND OUT WHAT HAPPENED!
--DON'T KNOW WHAT HAPPENED, BUT I DO KNOW IT'S THE STUFF OF WHICH PANIC AND RIOT IS MADE, AND SINCE I'M THE ONLY COP ON THIS BEAT--
--I'M GOING TO DO MY BEST TO MAINTAIN ORDER!
SORRY, LADIES, BUT CAN'T YOU SEE WHAT'S HAPPENED?! I'VE GOT TO LOCK UP AND PROTECT MY MERCHANDISE!
FURTHERMORE, SOMETHING'S GOT TO BE DONE ABOUT THIS INTOLERABLE SITUATION!
WAY I LOOK AT IT, IT'S JUST ONE MORE THING THE CITY'S TOSSIN' AT US TO KEEP LIFE LIVELY! HEY, WE'RE STILL BREATHIN', RIGHT?
C'MON, LET'S SEE WHAT'S COOKIN'.
ALL RIGHT, SO IT'S INCREDIBLE--BUT IT'S REALLY JUST ONE MORE PROBLEM THIS DEMOLITION CREW MUST DEAL WITH.
YNAMITE
AUTION!
MEN WORKING
I'VE BEEN ASSIGNED TO TAKE THIS BUILDING DOWN, AND NOTHING'S GOING TO STOP ME...
...OR MY NAME ISN'T LEW SHINER!
HE, LIKE ALL THE OTHERS, GRAVITATES TOWARD THE CENTER OF THE FLOATING ISLAND...

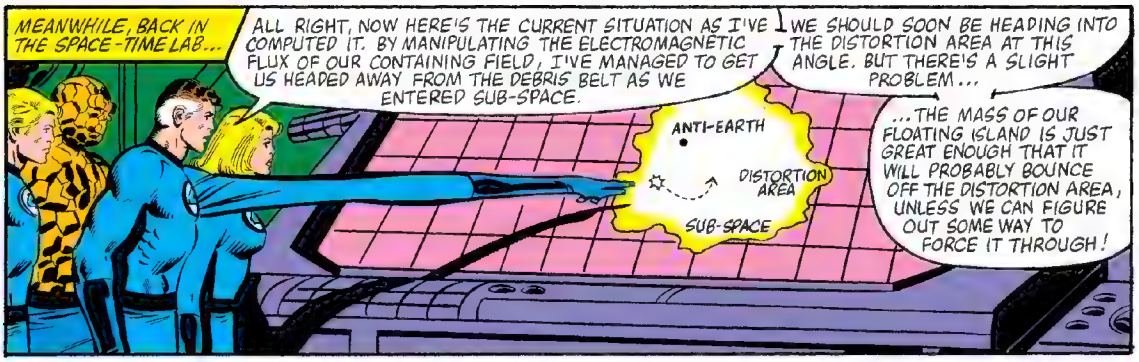

...TO THE FAMED BAXTER BUILDING ITSELF!
I TURNED ON THE BUILDING'S LOWER-FLOOR ALARM SYSTEMS LIKE REED ASKED, SIS--
-- BUT IT REALLY WASN'T NECESSARY. MOST OF THE PEOPLE IN THE OFFICES BELOW US HAD ALREADY EVACUATED THE BUILDING!
SO, I SEE, JOHNNY, THEY SEEM TO BE MILLING ABOUT IN THE STREETS. IN FACT, IT LOOKS LIKE THE CROWD IS GROWING LARGER.
WHAT DID YA EXPECT, SUZIE? WHO ELSE ARE THEY GONNA GO TO, BUT THE BIG, STRONG HEROES WHO PUT 'EM IN THIS PREDICAMENT IN THE FIRST PLACE?
LOOKIT 'EM DOWN THERE! IT'S JUST SINKIN' IN TO A LOT OF 'EM THAT THEY AIN'T IN NEW YORK ANYMORE.
US, WE'RE THE BIG-SHOT HEROES... WE'RE USED TO PUTTIN' OUR NECKS ON THE LINE IN SCREWY PLACES LIKE THIS. BUT WHAT ABOUT THEM?
HOW'S THE AVERAGE JOE GONNA REACT WHEN HE REALIZES THAT HE AIN'T EVEN IN THE RIGHT UNIVERSE?!
WAIT JUST A MINUTE, BEN! IF REED HADN'T TRANSPORTED THIS CHUNK OF REAL ESTATE TO THE NEGATIVE ZONE WHEN HE DID, EBON SEEKER WOULD HAVE SENT THE WHOLE EARTH DOWN THE TUBES...
...MAYBE THE WHOLE COSMOS!
TRY TELLIN' THAT TO THE FOLKS DOWN IN THE STREETS, TORCHIE!
BUT TELL ME THIS... WHAT'RE YA GONNA SAY TO THEM WHEN THEY ASK WHY OUR BOSS-MAN DIDN'T JUST SLAP HIS TRANSPORT-CONTAINMENT FIELD AROUND THE TOP O' THE BAXTER BUILDING?
REED DIDN'T HAVE TIME TO SHRINK THE FIELD, AND YOU KNOW IT!
BEN... JOHNNY... PLEASE!
MAYBE BEN HAS A POINT...
...MAYBE I COULD HAVE WAITED A LITTLE LONGER. MAYBE THERE WAS TIME TO SHRINK THE FIELD... OR AT LEAST, TO TOTALLY EVACUATE THE AREA.
AW, STRETCH! YA KNOW I DIDN'T MEAN THAT I THOUGHT YA SCREWED UP!
THANKS, OLD FRIEND! I JUST WISH I WAS AS SURE OF MYSELF AS YOU ARE! HOWEVER, THE FACT REMAINS--
--THAT SEVERAL HUNDRED PEOPLE DOWN THERE ARE PROBABLY ON THE VERGE OF PANIC. AND IF I CAN'T STEER THIS LITTLE PIECE OF HOME OUT OF THE NEGATIVE ZONE IN TIME...
...A FULL-SCALE RIOT COULD RESULT!
REED, YOU MEAN THERE'S HOPE OF RETURNING TO EARTH?


A SLIM ONE, BUT, YES, THERE IS HOPE! COME, I'LL SHOW YOU!
SOON, DEEP WITHIN THE SPACE-TIME LABORATORY...
I'VE ALTERED THE FUNCTIONS OF OUR NEGATIVE ZONE VIEW-SCANNER TO CHECK ON OUR PROGRESS THROUGH THE ZONE.
#A
PROGRESS? YOU MEAN WE'RE MOVING?
YES, JOHNNY. AND WE'RE PICKING UP SPEED. THANKS TO THE BIZARRE LOCALIZED GRAVITY WELLS OF THE ZONE.
#B
WE ORIGINALLY POPPED INTO THE NEGATIVE ZONE AT POINT A ON THE SCREEN... WE'RE NOW AT POINT B. AND IN A MATTER OF MINUTES, WE SHOULD BE DRAWING NEAR TO THE ZONE'S DISTORTION AREA!
DISTORTION AREA? HEY, AIN'T THAT THE WACKY PLACE WHERE WE USUALLY ENTER THE NEGATIVE ZONE?
THAT'S RIGHT, BEN. THE ONLY REASON WE EMERGED AS FAR FROM THAT AREA AS WE DID WAS, NO DOUBT, DUE TO EBON SEEKER'S OWN GRAVITATIONAL VORTEX WARPING MY CONTAINING FIELD'S TRANS-DIMENSIONAL FLUX-EFFECT.
UH, YEAH... IF YOU SAY SO, BUT IF WE'RE GETTIN CLOSER TO THE OL' D.A., DON'T THAT MEAN WE'RE PRACTICALLY HOME FREE?
I WISH IT WAS THAT SIMPLE, BEN. UNFORTUNATELY, AS WE NEAR THE DISTORTION AREA, WE'LL FIRST BE WARPED INTO SUB-SPACE--
--AND THAT JUST MIGHT DESTROY US!
BUT, REED, I THOUGHT THAT SUB-SPACE WAS PART OF THE NEGATIVE ZONE!
IT IS... AND IT ISN'T, SUE. YOU SEE, SUB-SPACE IS ACTUALLY A NON-REALM WHICH LINKS OUR OWN UNIVERSE WITH THE NEGATIVE ZONE.
IN FACT, IT'S MY THEORY THAT SUB-SPACE COULD BE THE GATEWAY TO AN INFINITE NUMBER OF SPACE-TIME CONTINUUMS... EVEN TO ALTERNATE REALITIES.
THE DANGER WE FACE IS AT THE VERY INTERFACE OF SUB-SPACE AND THE NEGATIVE ZONE... FOR THERE LIES ANTI-EARTH--
"--AN ANTI-MATTER DOUBLE OF OUR WORLD, SURROUNDED BY A DESTRUCTIVE DEBRIS BELT OF METEOROIDIC PARTICLES!"
YEAH, I REMEMBER THAT DEBRIS BELT. * HEY, HOW COME WE DIDN'T RUN INTO IT THE LAST FEW TIMES WE MESSED WITH THE NEG ZONE?
BECAUSE I HAD MANAGED TO ALTER THE NEGATIVE ZONE PORTAL TO PROJECT US AWAY FROM THE DEBRIS BELT.
WE DON'T HAVE THAT SAFETY BUFFER NOW, THOUGH. WE'LL HAVE TO CHANCE RUNNING INTO A VERITABLE SHOWER OF ANTI-MATTER TO REACH THE DISTORTION AREA.
*BEN EXPERIENCED IT IN F.F. ANNUAL #6 -- J.S.

BUT, REED, YOU ONCE TOLD ME THAT THE DEBRIS BELT WAS MADE UP OF POSITIVE MATTER.
SO I THOUGHT AT THE TIME, SUE. HOWEVER, I'VE SINCE DISCOVERED THAT AS MUCH AS FIFTY PERCENT MAY BE ANTI-MATTER! MY CONTAINING FIELD SHOULD INSULATE US FROM MOST OF IT--
-- BUT IF WE'RE CAUGHT IN ANTI-EARTH'S GRAVITY, AND DRAWN DEEPER INTO THE BELT, WE WON'T HAVE A CHANCE!
AIN'T THERE SOME WAY WE CAN AVOID THAT STRETCH?
THERE SHOULD BE, BEN! I HAVE MY COMPUTERS WORKING ON A SOLUTION, BUT I CAN'T CHANNEL MUCH POWER INTO THEM WITHOUT WEAKENING THE FIELD.
I'M AFRAID THAT THIS ONE IS GOING TO BE CLOSE!
REED! LOOK OUTSIDE! THE CROWD IS TURNING INTO A MOB!
THEY'RE FRIGHTENED, JOHNNY--
-- THE SITUATION IS TOO MUCH FOR THEM TO GRASP. THEY NEED ANSWERS... REASONS!
THEN I'D BETTER GET DOWN THERE AND GIVE 'EM SOME!
FLAME ON!
HEY, EVERYBODY! LISTEN TO ME!
WE'RE TIRED OF LISTENING!
LOOK, THE F.F. IS DOING ITS BEST TO GET US ALL OUT OF THIS MESS. DON'T MAKE IT ANY HARDER!
STOP IT! THE LAD'S RIGHT!
LET'S GIVE THEM A CHANCE!

WHY? I THINK THEY BROUGHT US HERE ON PURPOSE! I THINK THAT THE FAMOUS DR. RICHARDS IS USING US AS GUINEA PIGS FOR ONE OF HIS CRAZY EXPERIMENTS! SURE, THEY'LL GET US BACK... WHEN THEY'RE THROUGH WITH US!
WELL, WE DON'T HAVE TIME TO WAIT! WE DEMAND TO BE RETURNED TO NORMAL NOW!
YEAH! RIGHT ON!
THAT DOES IT!
GET OUT OF HERE! NOW! BEFORE I SINGE ALL OF YOU BALD!
YA SCATTERED 'EM PRETTY GOOD, TORCHIE -- BUT IF YA ASK ME, THE CREEPS DESERVED WORSE.
I'LL KEEP THEM IN LINE, LADS.
AFTER ALL, THIS IS STILL MY BEAT, EVEN IF I HAVE LOST MY PRECINCT.
NOT THAT I DOUBT YER WORD, O'ROARKE, BUT IF YA DON'T MIND--
RI...
PP!
--WE'LL TAKE THE MATTER O' PROTECTION INTA OUR OWN HANDS!
OKAY, MATCH-STICK, MELT THIS HUNK O' PAVEMENT OVER THE ENTRANCE.
BAXTER BUILDING
RIGHT, BEN! IF THIS DOESN'T KEEP THAT MOB OUT OF OUR HAIR, NOTHING WILL!
BUT WHEN THE TASK IS DONE, THE TORCH TURNS GLUM...
TRAPPED IN A HOSTILE OCEAN OF DARKNESS... SURROUNDED BY A MOB WHO'D LIKE TO CRUCIFY US...
WELL, AT LEAST THINGS CAN'T GET ANY WORSE!


BUT, IN THE DEPTHS OF SUB-SPACE...
SO, I WAS CORRECT! EVEN NOW, THE INVADERS DRAW NEAR TO THE INTERFACE OF MY REALM!
FOR COUNTLESS EONS, THE DENIZENS OF THE NEGATIVE ZONE HAVE ATTEMPTED TO DISPOSE OF THEIR VERMIN ... AND NOW, A SMALL CITY THINKS TO INTRUDE ON ME!
THIS SHALL NOT BE! STYGORR THE NIGHTLORD SHALL REPULSE THIS INVASION! ALL SHALL DIE!
AND SO SAYING, STYGORR STREAKS TOWARD THE DRIFTING, EARTHLY ISLE--
--WHERE, AT THE DEMOLITION SITE...
WE ALL WANT TO GET BACK HOME! WE HAVE THINGS TO DO... LIVES TO LIVE! ME, I HAVE TO OVERSEE THE DEMOLITION OF THIS BUILDING!
I'M ON A RIGID SCHEDULE, AND IF THERE'S ANYTHING I'VE LEARNED IN SEVENTEEN YEARS OF TOP-LEVEL MANAGEMENT, IT'S THAT THERE'S NO ROOM FOR EXCUSES! THE F.F. ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR THIS --
--SO WE ALL HAVE TO STAND TOGETHER AND STOP THEM! BUT YOU MUST ACCEPT MY ORDERS WITHOUT QUESTION! IF YOU CAN'T DO THAT, WE DON'T NEED YOU! CLEAR?
WELL... OKAY, SHINER... FOR THE TIME BEING.
DYNAMITE
ALL RIGHT! NOW, WE'RE GOING TO SEIZE THE BAXTER BUILDING AND FORCE THEM TO RETURN US TO NORMAL -- AND HERE'S HOW WE'RE GOING TO DO IT!

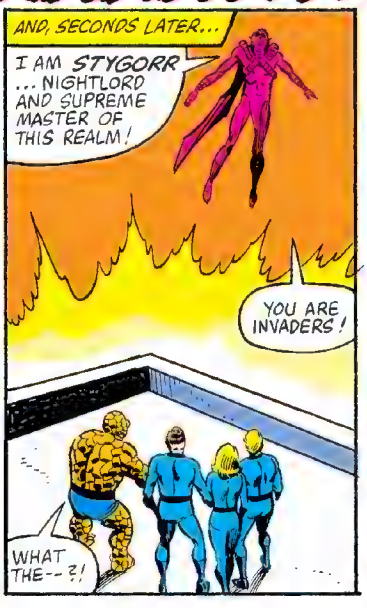

MEANWHILE, BACK IN THE SPACE-TIME LAB...
ALL RIGHT, NOW HERE'S THE CURRENT SITUATION AS I'VE COMPUTED IT. BY MANIPULATING THE ELECTROMAGNETIC FLUX OF OUR CONTAINING FIELD, I'VE MANAGED TO GET US HEADED AWAY FROM THE DEBRIS BELT AS WE ENTERED SUB-SPACE.
WE SHOULD SOON BE HEADING INTO THE DISTORTION AREA AT THIS ANGLE. BUT THERE'S A SLIGHT PROBLEM...
ANTI-EARTH
DISTORTION AREA
SUB-SPACE
...THE MASS OF OUR FLOATING ISLAND IS JUST GREAT ENOUGH THAT IT WILL PROBABLY BOUNCE OFF THE DISTORTION AREA, UNLESS WE CAN FIGURE OUT SOME WAY TO FORCE IT THROUGH!

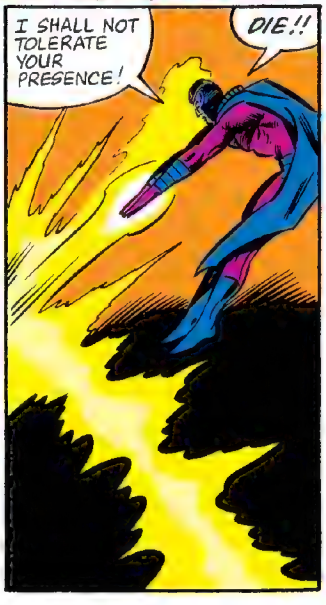
SOMEHOW, WE MUST FIND A WAY TO BUILD UP A NEAR-INFINITE MOMENTUM SO THAT THE ISLAND, UPON IMPACT WITH THE HEART OF THE DISTORTION AREA, WILL TURN INSIDE-OUT AND WARP BACK INTO OUR REALITY!
SHEESH! YOU'RE NOT ASKIN' MUCH, ARE YA?

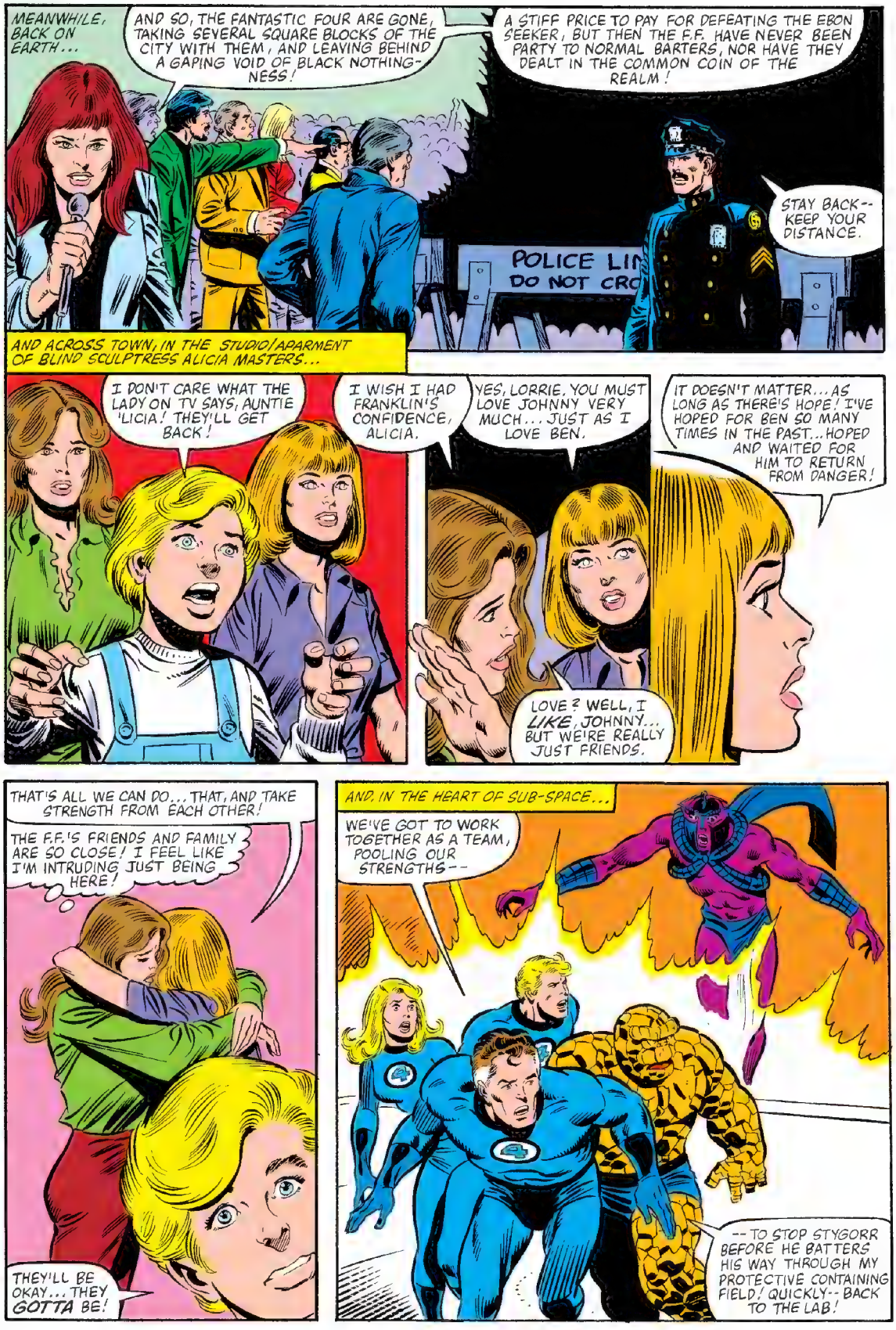
I AGREE THAT THE CONCEPT IS, DIFFICULT, BEN... ALMOST METAPHYSICAL. AND THE EXECUTION WILL BE EVEN ROUGHER.
THE PROBLEM WE FACE IS HOW TO GENERATE THE NECESSARY FORCE IN THE SHORT TIME WE HAVE.

WELL... WHAT'S OUR CHANCES OF DOIN' THAT?
REMOTE. PERHAPS... IMPOSSIBLE.
BEN GRIMM PAUSES, SEARCHING FOR THE RIGHT WORDS TO REASSURE HIS FRIEND. BUT BEFORE HE CAN DRAW ANOTHER BREATH...

BRRRRAAAAAANNNNNGGGGG

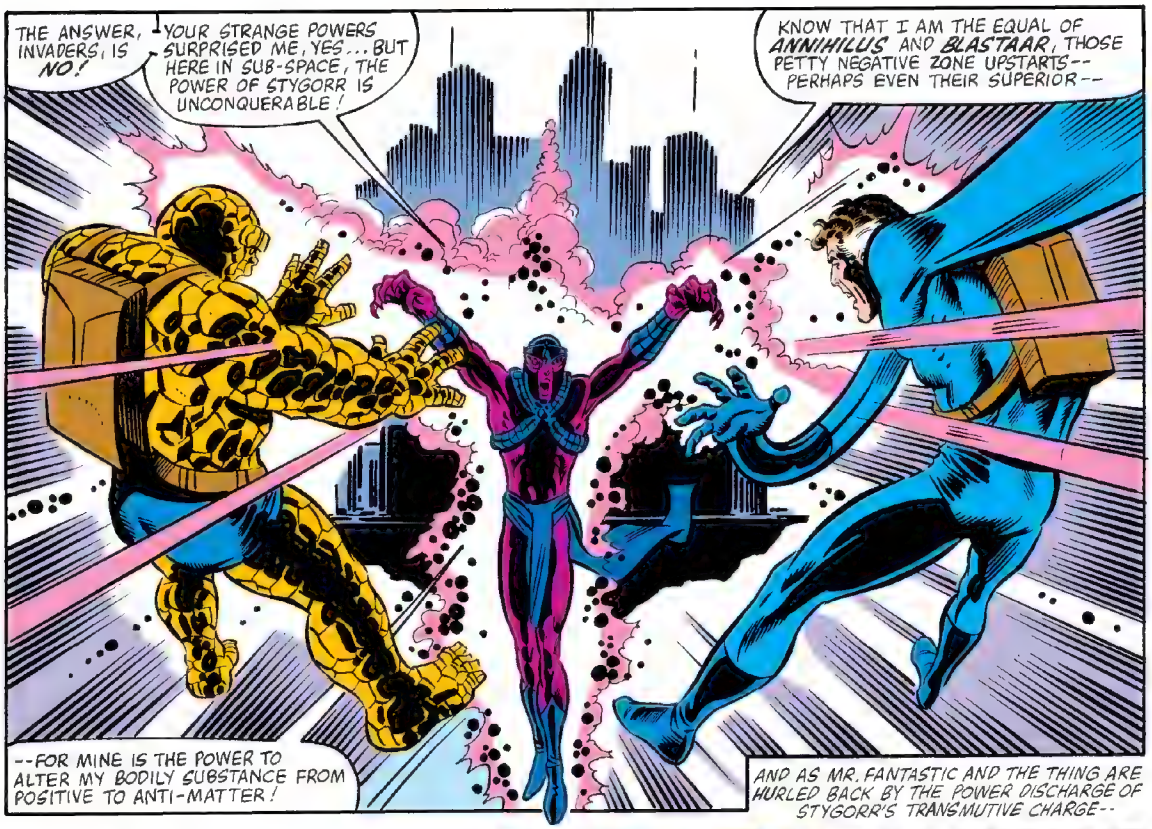


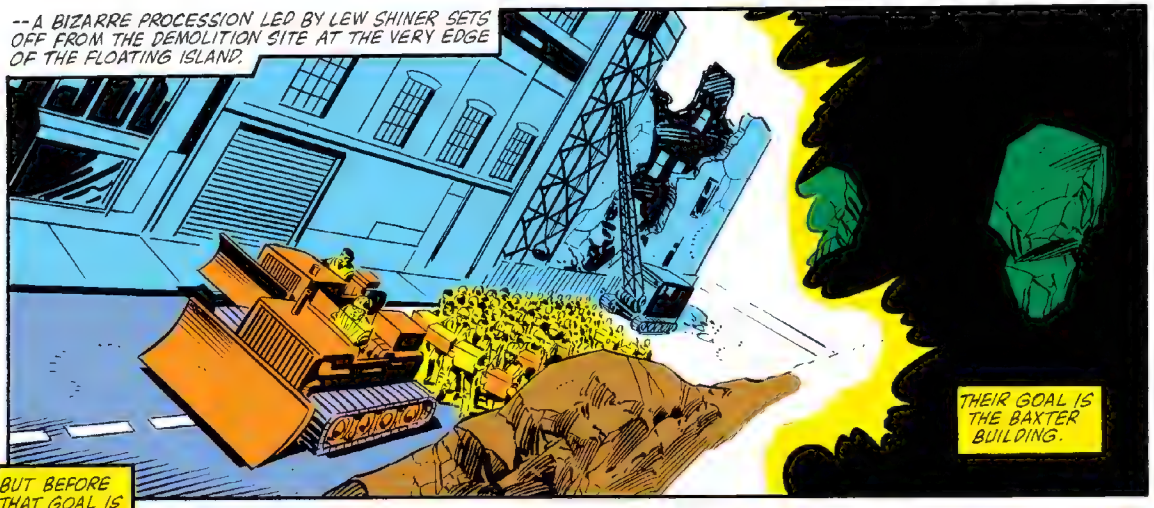


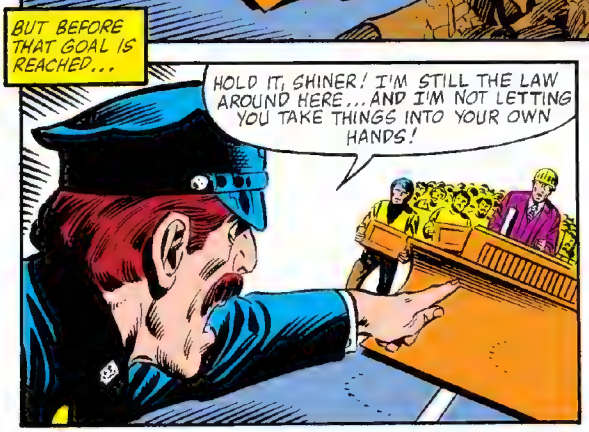

MEANWHILE, BACK ON EARTH...
AND SO, THE FANTASTIC FOUR ARE GONE, TAKING SEVERAL SQUARE BLOCKS OF THE CITY WITH THEM, AND LEAVING BEHIND A GAPING VOID OF BLACK NOTHINGNESS!
A STIFF PRICE TO PAY FOR DEFEATING THE EBON SEEKER, BUT THEN THE F.F. HAVE NEVER BEEN PARTY TO NORMAL BARTERS, NOR HAVE THEY DEALT IN THE COMMON COIN OF THE REALM!
STAY BACK-- KEEP YOUR DISTANCE.
POLICE LIN
DO NOT CRO
AND ACROSS TOWN, IN THE STUDIO/APARMENT OF BLIND SCULPTRESS ALICIA MASTERS...
I DON'T CARE WHAT THE LADY ON TV SAYS, AUNTIE 'LICIA! THEY'LL GET BACK!
I WISH I HAD FRANKLIN'S CONFIDENCE, ALICIA.
YES, LORRIE. YOU MUST LOVE JOHNNY VERY MUCH... JUST AS I LOVE BEN.
IT DOESN'T MATTER... AS LONG AS THERE'S HOPE! I'VE HOPED FOR BEN SO MANY TIMES IN THE PAST... HOPED AND WAITED FOR HIM TO RETURN FROM DANGER!
LOVE? WELL, I LIKE, JOHNNY... BUT WE'RE REALLY JUST FRIENDS.
THAT'S ALL WE CAN DO... THAT, AND TAKE STRENGTH FROM EACH OTHER!
THE F.F.'S FRIENDS AND FAMILY ARE SO CLOSE! I FEEL LIKE I'M INTRUDING JUST BEING HERE!
THEY'LL BE OKAY... THEY GOTTA BE!
AND, IN THE HEART OF SUB-SPACE...
WE'VE GOT TO WORK TOGETHER AS A TEAM, POOLING OUR STRENGTHS--
--TO STOP STYGORR BEFORE HE BATTERS HIS WAY THROUGH MY PROTECTIVE CONTAINING FIELD! QUICKLY-- BACK TO THE LAB!

SOON...
I'VE RECALIBRATED OUR NEGATIVE ZONE PORTAL TO WARP BEN AND MYSELF OUT INTO SUB-SPACE. SUE, YOU KEEP WATCH OVER THE CONTAINING FIELD. IF STYGORR DOES BREACH IT, YOU'LL HAVE TO USE YOUR INVISIBLE FORCE FIELD TO REINFORCE IT!
WHAT ABOUT ME, REED?
MY INSTRUMENTS SHOW WE'RE NEARING A HEAVY ANTI-MATTER AREA, JOHNNY. YOUR FLAME POWER WOULD BE RENDERED USELESS.
THE FIELD-EFFECT HARNESSES BEN AND I ARE WEARING SHOULD PROTECT US... BUT I DON'T HAVE TIME TO RIG UP MOORING LINES. I'LL HAVE TO MAINTAIN CONTACT WITH THE LAB MANUALLY!
WATCH MY HAND, JOHNNY! IF I START TO LOSE MY GRIP, ANCHOR ME... AND, WHATEVER YOU DO, DON'T LET GO!
GOTCHA!
OKAY, SUE, OPEN THE PORTAL!
SUSAN RICHARDS MOUTHS A SILENT PRAYER, AS THE MAN SHE LOVES AND HIS BEST FRIEND PLUNGE THROUGH THE SHIMMERING WARP--
--AND INTO THE EERIE WORLD OF SUB-SPACE!
YEESH! I HATE THIS CREEPY PLACE!
LOOK, BEN! THERE HE IS!

I HAVE HIM SNARED, BEN!
QUICKLY, NOW-- I'LL TRY TO DISTRACT HIM FROM BLASTING AT THE CONTAINING FIELD WHILE YOU--!
NOT TA WORRY, STRETCH-- THESE LITTLE ASTEROIDS ARE JUST WHAT DOC BENJIE ORDERED! AN' WITH THIS GLITZY HARNESS, I DON'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT STOMPIN' ON THIS ANTI-MATTER!
LEMME JUST SNAP OFF A CHUNK O' THE PITCHER'S MOUND HERE...
...AND THEN WE GO THROUGH THE WIND-UP...
...THE PITCH...
...AN' STEEE-RIKE-- HE'S OUT! NOLAN RYAN COULDN'TA DONE BETTER!
CAN IT BE, BEN?!
HAVE WE ACTUALLY DEFEATED HIM THIS EASILY?


THE ANSWER, INVADERS, IS NO!
YOUR STRANGE POWERS SURPRISED ME, YES... BUT HERE IN SUB-SPACE, THE POWER OF STYGORR IS UNCONQUERABLE!
KNOW THAT I AM THE EQUAL OF ANNIHILUS AND BLASTAAR, THOSE PETTY NEGATIVE ZONE UPSTARTS-- PERHAPS EVEN THEIR SUPERIOR--
--FOR MINE IS THE POWER TO ALTER MY BODILY SUBSTANCE FROM POSITIVE TO ANTI-MATTER!
AND AS MR. FANTASTIC AND THE THING ARE HURLED BACK BY THE POWER DISCHARGE OF STYGORR'S TRANSMUTIVE CHARGE--

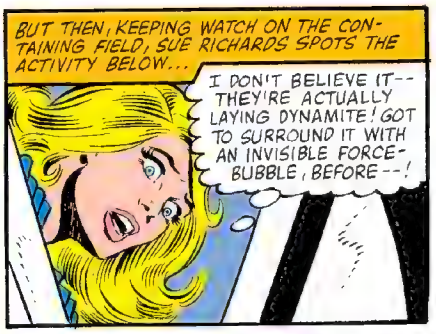

--A BIZARRE PROCESSION LED BY LEW SHINER SETS OFF FROM THE DEMOLITION SITE AT THE VERY EDGE OF THE FLOATING ISLAND.
THEIR GOAL IS THE BAXTER BUILDING.

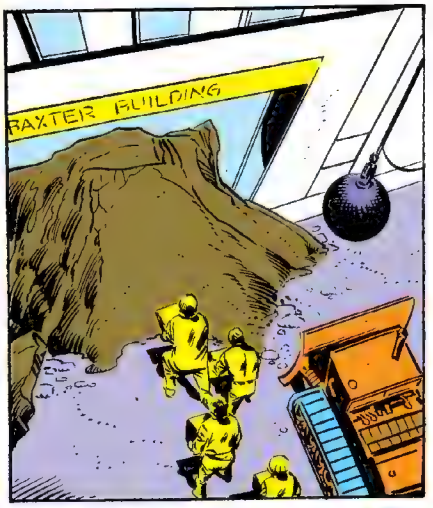

BUT BEFORE THAT GOAL IS REACHED...
HOLD IT, SHINER! I'M STILL THE LAW AROUND HERE... AND I'M NOT LETTING YOU TAKE THINGS INTO YOUR OWN HANDS!

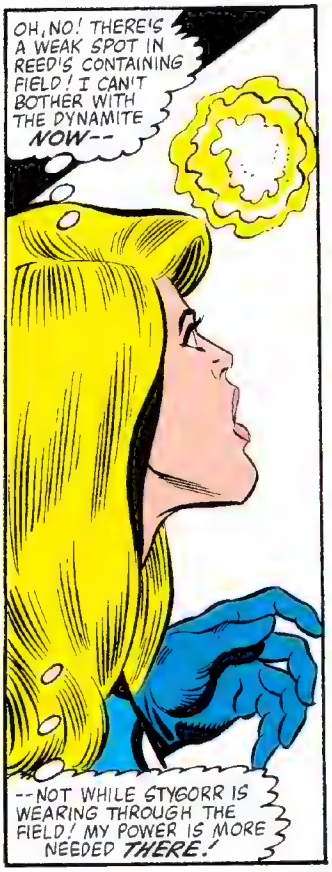
THE NORMAL CHANNELS OF LAW AND ORDER NO LONGER EXIST HERE, O'ROARKE!
TAKE HIM!

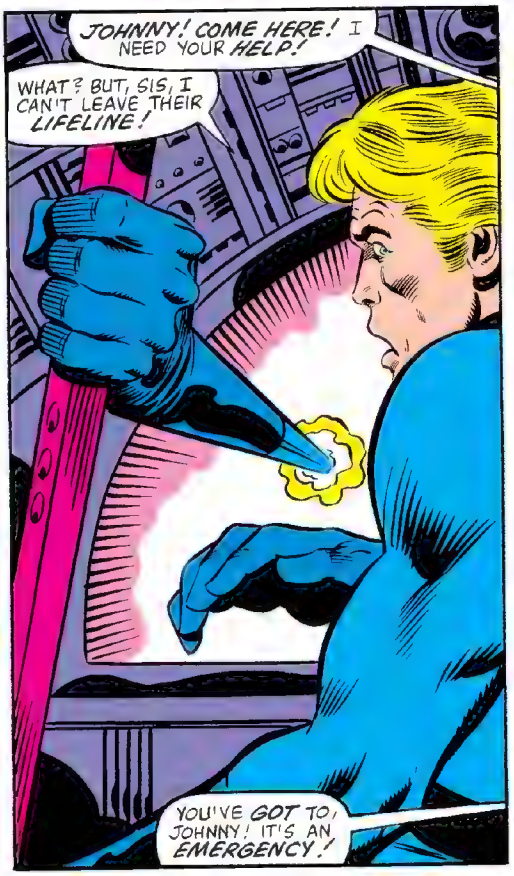
O'ROARKE IS A GOOD COP, PERHAPS TOO GOOD! HE CANNOT BRING HIMSELF TO BEAR DEADLY FORCE...
TAKE HIS GUN--GIVE IT TO SHINER!
TIE HIM UP!
WAIT! LOOK--OUT THERE!
IT'S TWO OF THE F.F.--FIGHTING SOME KIND OF ALIEN OUT THERE!
GOOD! THEN WE ONLY HAVE TO OVERCOME THE OTHER TWO TO CAPTURE THE BAXTER BUILDING!
AND NOW THAT WE'RE MENACED BY THAT ALIEN OUT THERE, IT'S MORE VITAL THAN EVER THAT WE GET OUT OF HERE!
BUT... WHAT ABOUT MR. FANTASTIC AND THE THING?
THEY GOT THEMSELVES THERE--THEY CAN DARN WELL FIND THEIR OWN WAY BACK! ANY OBJECTIONS?
N-NO, I GUESS NOT.
BUT THE SEEDS OF DOUBT ABOUT LEW SHINER'S LEADERSHIP HAVE BEEN PLANTED...
WE'RE LIKE INSECTS TO HIM, STRETCH! HE AIN'T EVEN BOTHERIN' WITH US--HE'S JUST BLASTIN' AWAY AT THAT SAME SPOT ON YER CONTAININ' FIELD!
I KNOW, BEN!
AND THE FIELD CAN'T WITHSTAND THAT KIND OF SUSTAINED STRESS FOR LONG!

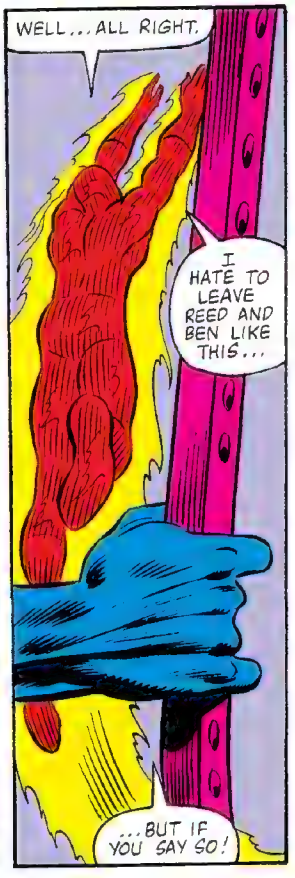
AND, WITHIN THE BATTERED FIELD, THE ASSAULT ON THE BAXTER BUILDING GATHERS MOMENTUM...
THEY'VE SEALED THE ENTRANCE! WE'LL HAVE TO SET THAT DYNAMITE CHARGE RIGHT IN FRONT OF IT!
BAXTER BUILDING
WE'LL BLOW THEIR LOUSY FORTRESS OPEN!


BUT THEN, KEEPING WATCH ON THE CONTAINING FIELD, SUE RICHARDS SPOTS THE ACTIVITY BELOW...
I DON'T BELIEVE IT-- THEY'RE ACTUALLY LAYING DYNAMITE! GOT TO SURROUND IT WITH AN INVISIBLE FORCE-BUBBLE, BEFORE--!


BAXTER BUILDING

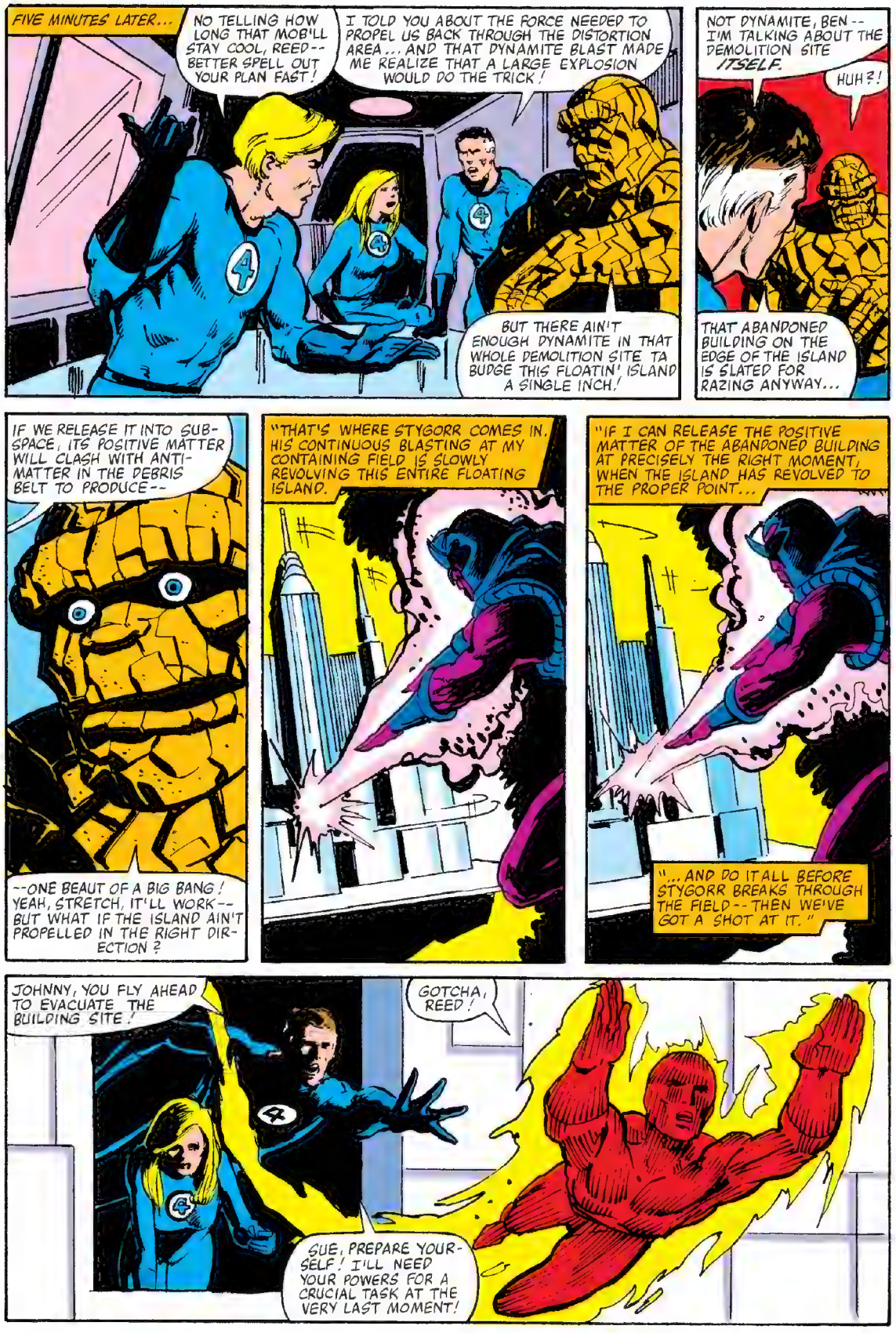

OH, NO! THERE'S A WEAK SPOT IN REED'S CONTAINING FIELD! I CAN'T BOTHER WITH THE DYNAMITE NOW--
--NOT WHILE STYGORR IS WEARING THROUGH THE FIELD! MY POWER IS MORE NEEDED THERE!

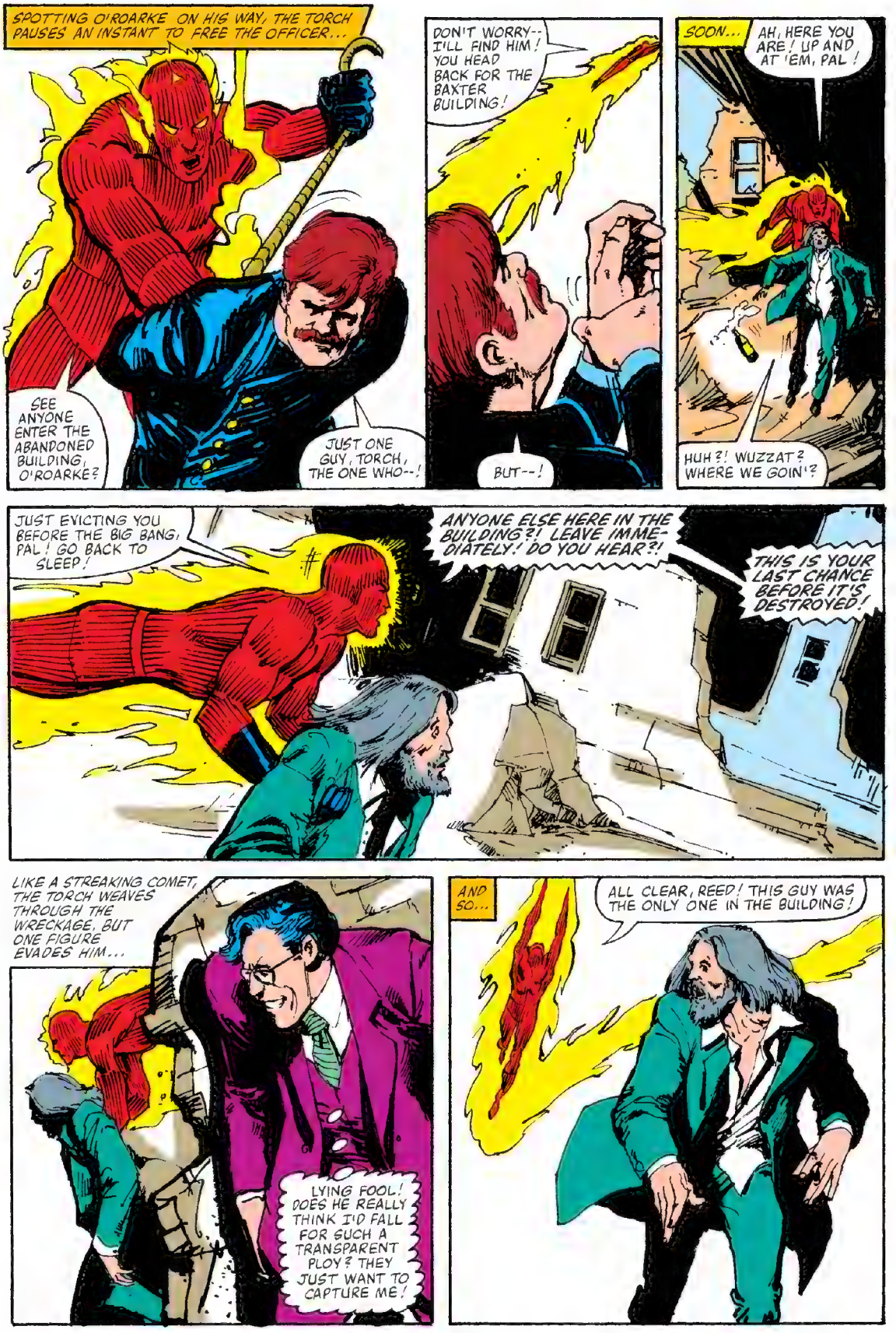

JOHNNY! COME HERE! I NEED YOUR HELP!
WHAT? BUT, SIS, I CAN'T LEAVE THEIR LIFELINE!
YOU'VE GOT TO, JOHNNY! IT'S AN EMERGENCY!

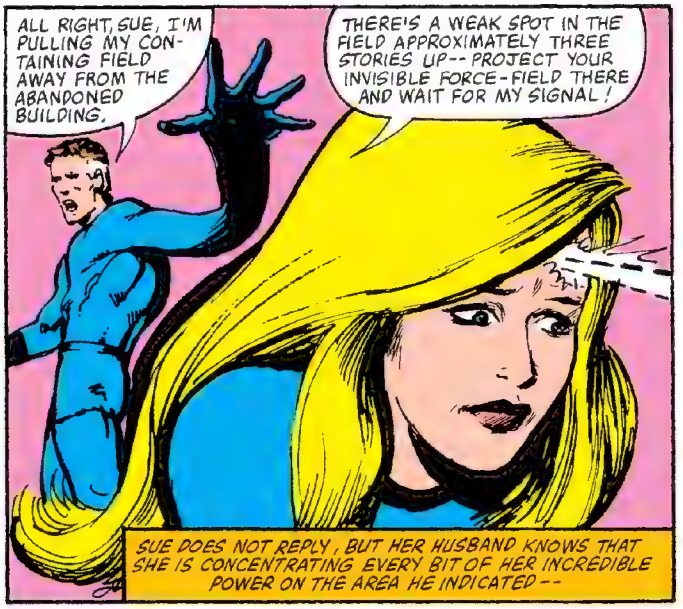

WELL... ALL RIGHT.
I HATE TO LEAVE REED AND BEN LIKE THIS...
...BUT IF YOU SAY SO!

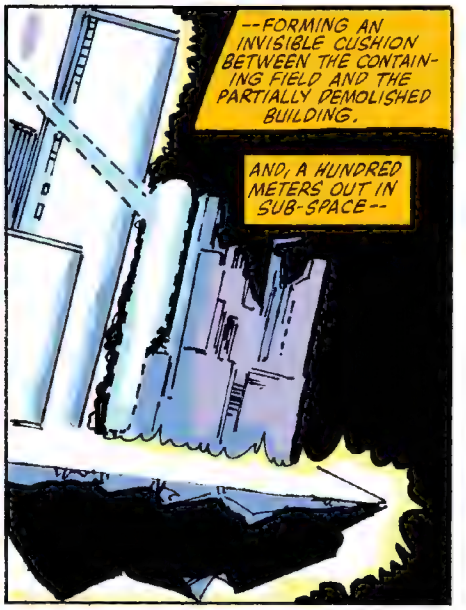
I'VE GOT TO REINFORCE THAT WEAK SPOT IN THE FIELD ABOVE, JOHNNY!
BUT THERE'S DYNAMITE-- DOWN BELOW!
I SEE IT, SIS.
THOSE CLOWNS NEVER GIVE UP, DO THEY?
I'LL JUST TOSS THEIR JUMBO FIRE-CRACKERS AS HIGH AS I CAN--
BOOOM
--AND LET 'EM EXPLODE HARMLESSLY IN MID-AIR!
WHAT THE--? THERE'S AN EXPLOSION, BEN-- INSIDE MY FIELD!
YEAH-- WHAT NOW?
I DON'T KNOW-- BUT IT'S GIVEN ME AN IDEA!
COME ON, BEN--I'M PULLING US BACK THROUGH THE PORTAL INTO THE BAXTER BUILDING!
BUT I AIN'T EVEN HAD A CHANCE TA THROW MY SUNDAY PUNCH AT STYGORR!

NOW THEY'RE TRYING TO SMASH THEIR WAY THROUGH THE ENTRANCE!
NOT A CHANCE--NOT AFTER I MELT THEIR WRECKING BALL TO MOLTEN SLAG!
NO! YOU WON'T FOIL ME AGAIN! I'VE GOT A BUILDING TO RAZE, AND I'LL RAZE THE BAXTER BUILDING, TOO, IF I HAVE TO!
AND IF I HAVE TO KILL THE HUMAN TORCH TO DO THAT...
BLAM
BUT THE GUN IS THE LAST STRAW...
THAT'S ENOUGH, SHINER!
WE'RE NOT GONNA LET YOU KILL THE MAN!
LET GO OF ME, YOU WEAK, REBELLIOUS FOOLS! YOU DON'T EVEN KNOW WHAT'S GOOD FOR YOU--CAN'T EVEN RECOGNIZE YOUR OWN BEST INTERESTS!
BUT I'LL BE BACK!
YOU'LL SEE! YOU'LL COME CRYING FOR ME--FOR MY EXPERTISE--AND I'LL BE BACK!
LET HIM RUN! HE'S NUTS!
HEY, WHERE'S TORCHIE? GOOD THING YA DIDN'T LOSE YER GRIP ON THAT POLE, STRETCH, OR WE'D'VE BEEN--
REED, IS THAT YOU? I CAN'T REINFORCE YOUR FIELD MUCH LONGER!
OKAY, SUE, I'M DIVERTING POWER FROM THE NEGATIVE ZONE PORTAL! THAT SHOULD STRENGTHEN THE FIELD FOR A WHILE...
...LONG ENOUGH TO ENACT MY PLAN, ANYWAY!


FIVE MINUTES LATER...
NO TELLING HOW LONG THAT MOB'LL STAY COOL, REED-- BETTER SPELL OUT YOUR PLAN FAST!
I TOLD YOU ABOUT THE FORCE NEEDED TO PROPEL US BACK THROUGH THE DISTORTION AREA... AND THAT DYNAMITE BLAST MADE ME REALIZE THAT A LARGE EXPLOSION WOULD DO THE TRICK!
BUT THERE AIN'T ENOUGH DYNAMITE IN THAT WHOLE DEMOLITION SITE TA BUDGE THIS FLOATIN' ISLAND A SINGLE INCH!
NOT DYNAMITE, BEN-- I'M TALKING ABOUT THE DEMOLITION SITE ITSELF.
HUH?!
THAT ABANDONED BUILDING ON THE EDGE OF THE ISLAND IS SLATED FOR RAZING ANYWAY...
IF WE RELEASE IT INTO SUB-SPACE, ITS POSITIVE MATTER WILL CLASH WITH ANTI-MATTER IN THE DEBRIS BELT TO PRODUCE--
--ONE BEAUT OF A BIG BANG! YEAH, STRETCH, IT'LL WORK-- BUT WHAT IF THE ISLAND AIN'T PROPELLED IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION?
"THAT'S WHERE STYGORR COMES IN. HIS CONTINUOUS BLASTING AT MY CONTAINING FIELD IS SLOWLY REVOLVING THIS ENTIRE FLOATING ISLAND.
"IF I CAN RELEASE THE POSITIVE MATTER OF THE ABANDONED BUILDING AT PRECISELY THE RIGHT MOMENT, WHEN THE ISLAND HAS REVOLVED TO THE PROPER POINT...
"...AND DO IT ALL BEFORE STYGORR BREAKS THROUGH THE FIELD-- THEN WE'VE GOT A SHOT AT IT."
JOHNNY, YOU FLY AHEAD TO EVACUATE THE BUILDING SITE!
GOTCHA, REED!
SUE, PREPARE YOURSELF! I'LL NEED YOUR POWERS FOR A CRUCIAL TASK AT THE VERY LAST MOMENT!


SPOTTING O'ROARKE ON HIS WAY, THE TORCH PAUSES AN INSTANT TO FREE THE OFFICER...
SEE ANYONE ENTER THE ABANDONED BUILDING, O'ROARKE?
JUST ONE GUY, TORCH, THE ONE WHO--!
DON'T WORRY--I'LL FIND HIM! YOU HEAD BACK FOR THE BAXTER BUILDING!
BUT--!
SOON...
AH, HERE YOU ARE! UP AND AT 'EM, PAL!
HUH?! WUZZAT? WHERE WE GOIN'?
JUST EVICTING YOU BEFORE THE BIG BANG, PAL! GO BACK TO SLEEP!
ANYONE ELSE HERE IN THE BUILDING?! LEAVE IMMEDIATELY! DO YOU HEAR?!
THIS IS YOUR LAST CHANCE BEFORE IT'S DESTROYED!
LIKE A STREAKING COMET, THE TORCH WEAVES THROUGH THE WRECKAGE, BUT ONE FIGURE EVADES HIM...
LYING FOOL! DOES HE REALLY THINK I'D FALL FOR SUCH A TRANSPARENT PLOY? THEY JUST WANT TO CAPTURE ME!
AND SO...
ALL CLEAR, REED! THIS GUY WAS THE ONLY ONE IN THE BUILDING!

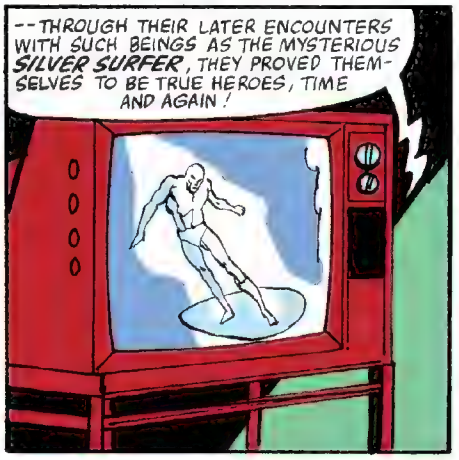

ALL RIGHT, SUE, I'M PULLING MY CONTAINING FIELD AWAY FROM THE ABANDONED BUILDING.
THERE'S A WEAK SPOT IN THE FIELD APPROXIMATELY THREE STORIES UP-- PROJECT YOUR INVISIBLE FORCE-FIELD THERE AND WAIT FOR MY SIGNAL!
SUE DOES NOT REPLY, BUT HER HUSBAND KNOWS THAT SHE IS CONCENTRATING EVERY BIT OF HER INCREDIBLE POWER ON THE AREA HE INDICATED--

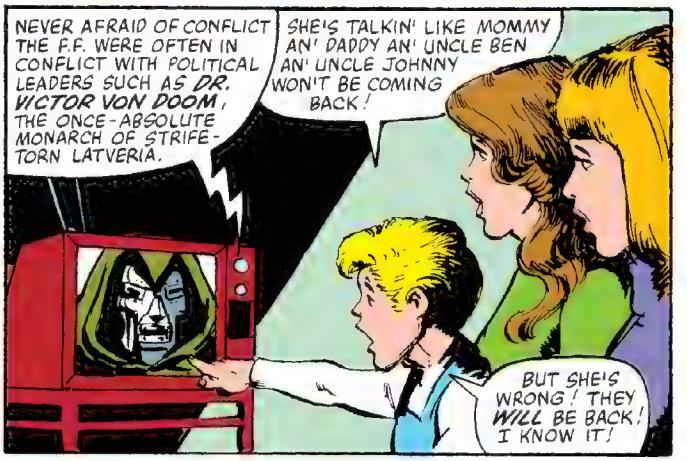

--FORMING AN INVISIBLE CUSHION BETWEEN THE CONTAINING FIELD AND THE PARTIALLY DEMOLISHED BUILDING.
AND, A HUNDRED METERS OUT IN SUB-SPACE--

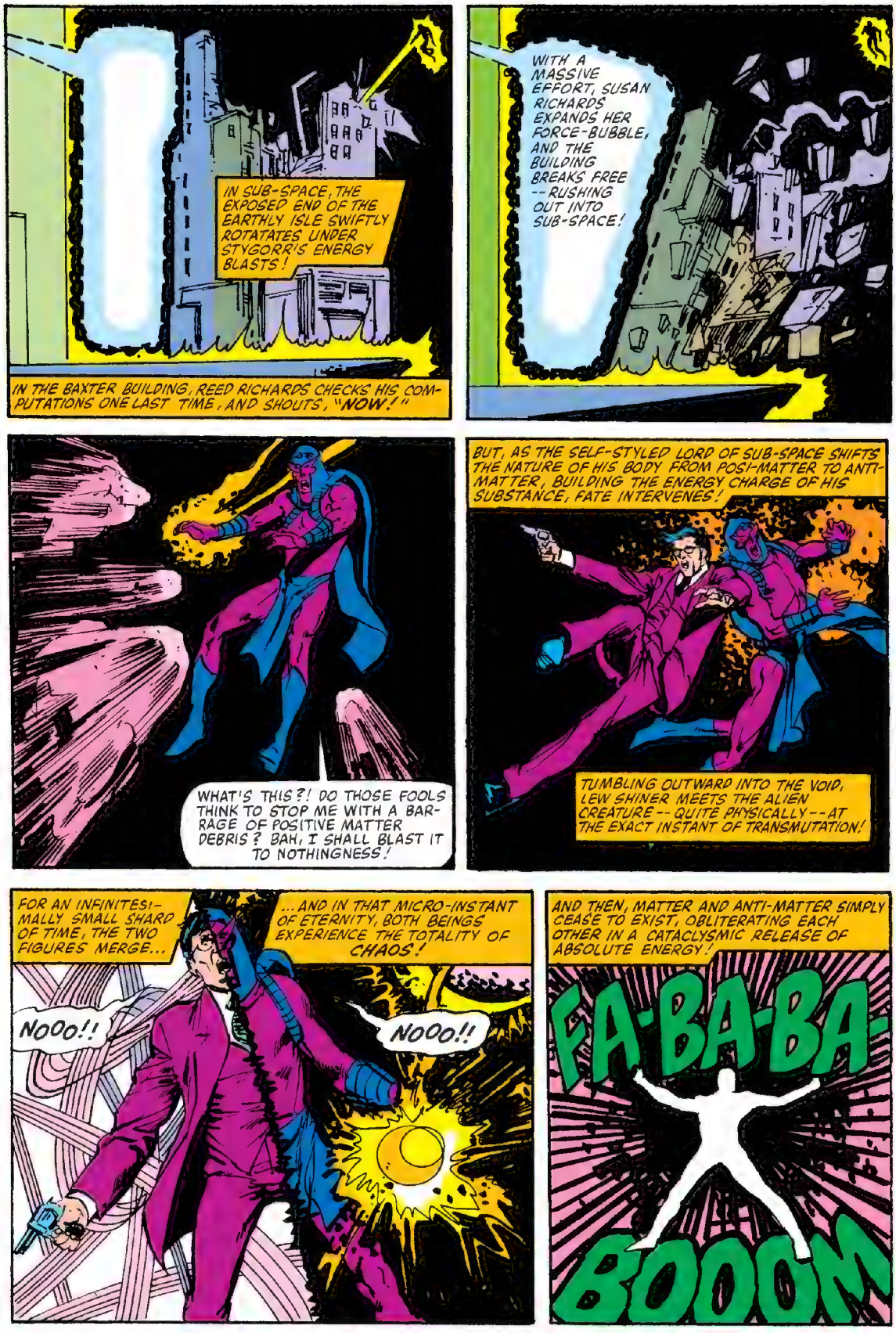
--A DARKLING FIGURE CONTINUES HIS ATTACK!
I SENSE A NEW WEAKNESS IN THE FIELD! I MUST FIND IT!

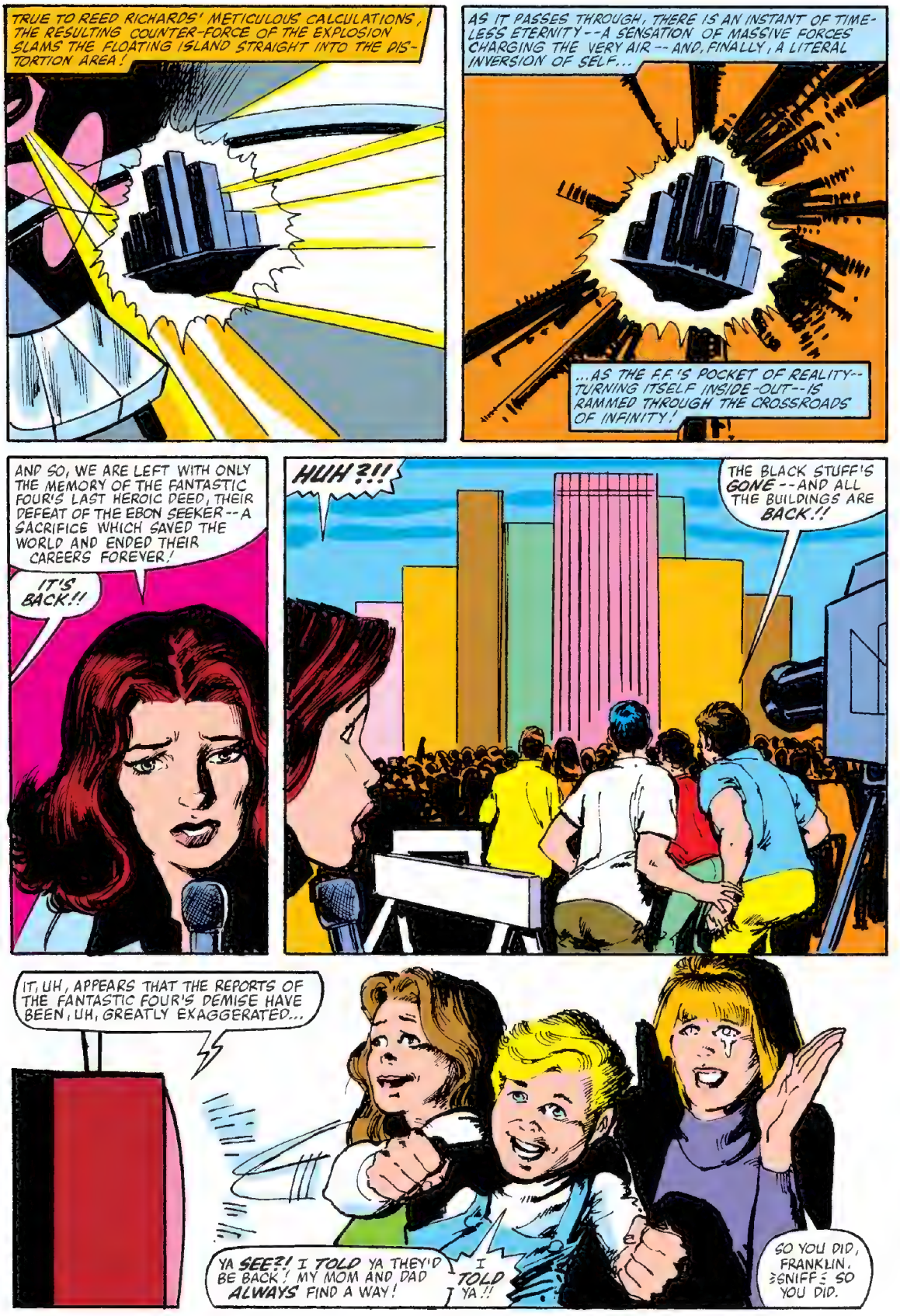
AND, MEANWHILE, ON EARTH...
ONE THING, OF WHICH THERE CAN BE NO DOUBT... THE FANTASTIC FOUR WILL BE MOURNED THE WORLD OVER!
SINCE THAT DAY WHEN THEY FIRST BRAVED THE UNKNOWN TERRORS OF SPACE, THEY ALWAYS STROVE TO HELP MANKIND...

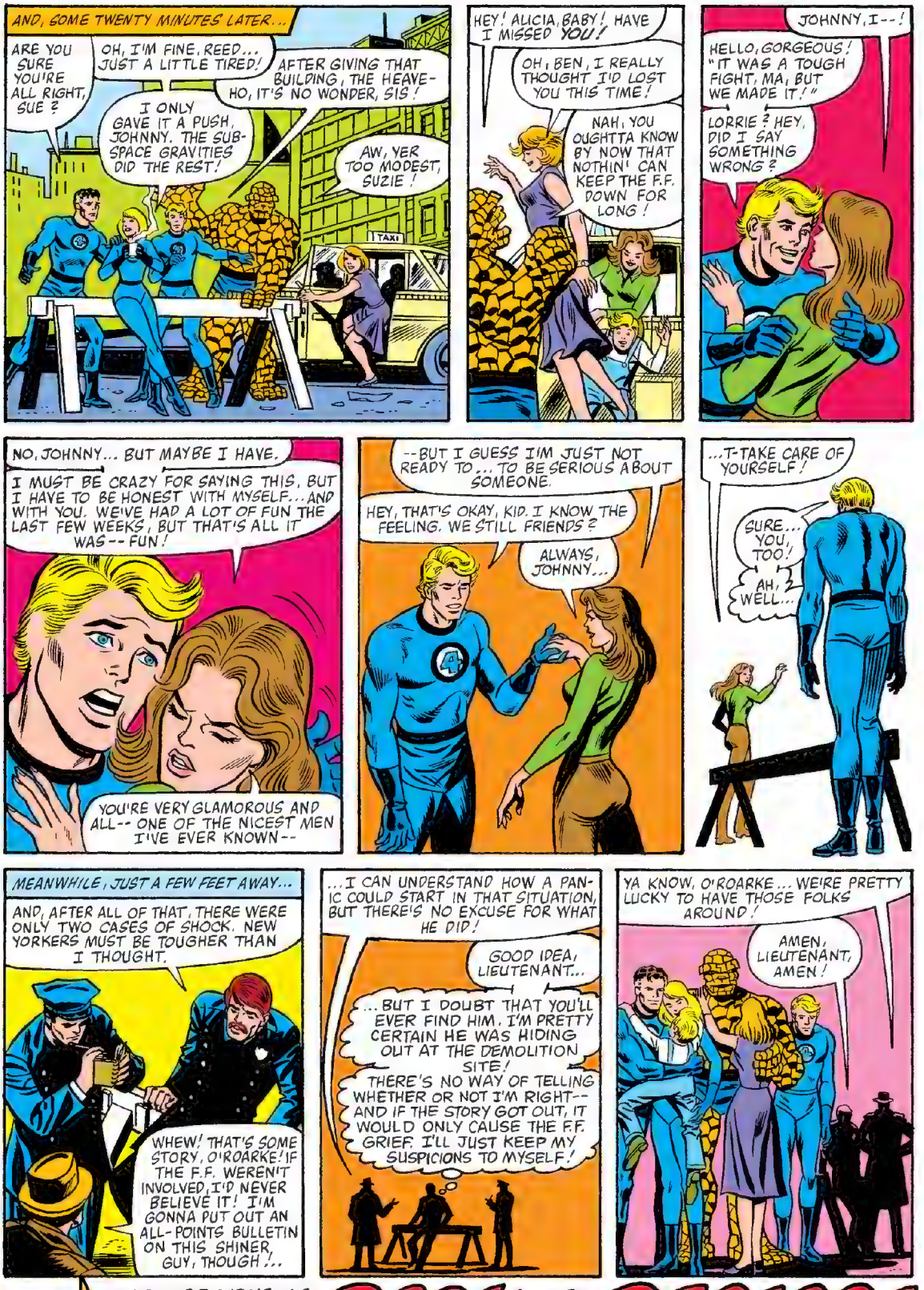
...FIGHTING THREATS THE LIKES OF WHICH FEW OTHERS COULD EVEN BEGIN TO FACE. FROM THEIR FIRST BATTLE WITH THE BIZARRE MOLE MAN--
READY SLIDE TWO... CUT TO SLIDE TWO.


--THROUGH THEIR LATER ENCOUNTERS WITH SUCH BEINGS AS THE MYSTERIOUS SILVER SURFER, THEY PROVED THEMSELVES TO BE TRUE HEROES, TIME AND AGAIN!


NEVER AFRAID OF CONFLICT THE F.F. WERE OFTEN IN CONFLICT WITH POLITICAL LEADERS SUCH AS DR. VICTOR VON DOOM, THE ONCE-ABSOLUTE MONARCH OF STRIFE-TORN LATVERIA.
SHE'S TALKIN' LIKE MOMMY AN' DADDY AN' UNCLE BEN AN' UNCLE JOHNNY WON'T BE COMING BACK!
BUT SHE'S WRONG! THEY WILL BE BACK! I KNOW IT!


IN SUB-SPACE, THE EXPOSED END OF THE EARTHLY ISLE SWIFTLY ROTATATES UNDER STYGORR'S ENERGY BLASTS!
WITH A MASSIVE EFFORT, SUSAN RICHARDS EXPANDS HER FORCE-BUBBLE, AND THE BUILDING BREAKS FREE --RUSHING OUT INTO SUB-SPACE!
IN THE BAXTER BUILDING, REED RICHARDS CHECKS HIS COMPUTATIONS ONE LAST TIME, AND SHOUTS, "NOW!"
WHAT'S THIS?! DO THOSE FOOLS THINK TO STOP ME WITH A BARRAGE OF POSITIVE MATTER DEBRIS? BAH, I SHALL BLAST IT TO NOTHINGNESS!
BUT, AS THE SELF-STYLED LORD OF SUB-SPACE SHIFTS THE NATURE OF HIS BODY FROM POSI-MATTER TO ANTI-MATTER, BUILDING THE ENERGY CHARGE OF HIS SUBSTANCE, FATE INTERVENES!
TUMBLING OUTWARD INTO THE VOID, LEW SHINER MEETS THE ALIEN CREATURE -- QUITE PHYSICALLY -- AT THE EXACT INSTANT OF TRANSMUTATION!
FOR AN INFINITESIMALLY SMALL SHARD OF TIME, THE TWO FIGURES MERGE...
...AND IN THAT MICRO-INSTANT OF ETERNITY, BOTH BEINGS EXPERIENCE THE TOTALITY OF CHAOS!
NOOO!!
NOOO!!
AND THEN, MATTER AND ANTI-MATTER SIMPLY CEASE TO EXIST, OBLITERATING EACH OTHER IN A CATACLYSMIC RELEASE OF ABSOLUTE ENERGY!
FA-BA-BA-
BOOM


TRUE TO REED RICHARDS' METICULOUS CALCULATIONS, THE RESULTING COUNTER-FORCE OF THE EXPLOSION SLAMS THE FLOATING ISLAND STRAIGHT INTO THE DISTORTION AREA!
AS IT PASSES THROUGH, THERE IS AN INSTANT OF TIMELESS ETERNITY--A SENSATION OF MASSIVE FORCES CHARGING THE VERY AIR--AND, FINALLY, A LITERAL INVERSION OF SELF...
...AS THE F.F.'S POCKET OF REALITY--TURNING ITSELF INSIDE-OUT--IS RAMMED THROUGH THE CROSSROADS OF INFINITY!
AND SO, WE ARE LEFT WITH ONLY THE MEMORY OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR'S LAST HEROIC DEED, THEIR DEFEAT OF THE EBON SEEKER--A SACRIFICE WHICH SAVED THE WORLD AND ENDED THEIR CAREERS FOREVER!
IT'S BACK!!
HUH?!!
THE BLACK STUFF'S GONE--AND ALL THE BUILDINGS ARE BACK!!
IT, UH, APPEARS THAT THE REPORTS OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR'S DEMISE HAVE BEEN, UH, GREATLY EXAGGERATED...
YA SEE?! I TOLD YA THEY'D BE BACK! MY MOM AND DAD ALWAYS FIND A WAY!
I TOLD YA!!
SO YOU DID, FRANKLIN. SNIFF SO YOU DID.


AND, SOME TWENTY MINUTES LATER...
ARE YOU SURE YOU'RE ALL RIGHT, SUE?
OH, I'M FINE, REED... JUST A LITTLE TIRED!
I ONLY GAVE IT A PUSH, JOHNNY. THE SUB-SPACE GRAVITIES DID THE REST!
AFTER GIVING THAT BUILDING, THE HEAVE-HO, IT'S NO WONDER, SIS!
AW, YER TOO MODEST, SUZIE!
TAXI
HEY! ALICIA, BABY! HAVE I MISSED YOU!
OH, BEN, I REALLY THOUGHT I'D LOST YOU THIS TIME!
NAH, YOU OUGHTTA KNOW BY NOW THAT NOTHIN' CAN KEEP THE F.F. DOWN FOR LONG!
JOHNNY, I--!
HELLO, GORGEOUS! "IT WAS A TOUGH FIGHT, MA, BUT WE MADE IT!"
LORRIE? HEY, DID I SAY SOMETHING WRONG?
NO, JOHNNY... BUT MAYBE I HAVE.
I MUST BE CRAZY FOR SAYING THIS, BUT I HAVE TO BE HONEST WITH MYSELF... AND WITH YOU. WE'VE HAD A LOT OF FUN THE LAST FEW WEEKS, BUT THAT'S ALL IT WAS -- FUN!
YOU'RE VERY GLAMOROUS AND ALL -- ONE OF THE NICEST MEN I'VE EVER KNOWN --
--BUT I GUESS I'M JUST NOT READY TO... TO BE SERIOUS ABOUT SOMEONE.
HEY, THAT'S OKAY, KID. I KNOW THE FEELING. WE STILL FRIENDS?
ALWAYS, JOHNNY...
...T-TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF!
SURE... YOU, TOO!
AH, WELL...
MEANWHILE, JUST A FEW FEET AWAY...
AND, AFTER ALL OF THAT, THERE WERE ONLY TWO CASES OF SHOCK. NEW YORKERS MUST BE TOUGHER THAN I THOUGHT.
WHEW! THAT'S SOME STORY, O'ROARKE! IF THE F.F. WEREN'T INVOLVED, I'D NEVER BELIEVE IT! I'M GONNA PUT OUT AN ALL-POINTS BULLETIN ON THIS SHINER, GUY, THOUGH!..
...I CAN UNDERSTAND HOW A PANIC COULD START IN THAT SITUATION, BUT THERE'S NO EXCUSE FOR WHAT HE DID!
GOOD IDEA, LIEUTENANT...
...BUT I DOUBT THAT YOU'LL EVER FIND HIM. I'M PRETTY CERTAIN HE WAS HIDING OUT AT THE DEMOLITION SITE!
THERE'S NO WAY OF TELLING WHETHER OR NOT I'M RIGHT -- AND IF THE STORY GOT OUT, IT WOULD ONLY CAUSE THE F.F. GRIEF. I'LL JUST KEEP MY SUSPICIONS TO MYSELF!
YA KNOW, O'ROARKE... WE'RE PRETTY LUCKY TO HAVE THOSE FOLKS AROUND!
AMEN, LIEUTENANT, AMEN!
NEXT ISSUE:
DIABLO RETURNS, AS JOHN BYRNE TAKES THE FABULOUS F.F. --
BACK TO THE BASICS!
DON'T MISS IT!

The Thing pinup from *The Fantastic Four* #219 letters page
by Joe Sinnott

Bill Sienkiewicz's first FF piece, inked by Terry Austin and originally intended to be a cover, saw print as a pinup in the back pages of *The Fantastic Four* #224.

The Fantastic Four #224, page 1 original art
by Bill Sienkiewicz & Pablo Marcos

Reed Richards! Ben Grimm! Sue Richards! Johnny Storm! Together they braved the unknown terrors of outer space and were changed into something more than human! MR. FANTASTIC! THE THING! THE INVISIBLE GIRL! THE HUMAN TORCH! And now the world will never again be the same!

THE DARKFIELD ILLUMINATION
EERILY, A CRYSTAL DOME GLOWS UPON A STAGE OF VAST AND FROZEN WASTE-LAND.
THE DOME IS SEEN TO COMPRISE A BIZARRE, ALMOST ALIEN CONFIGUR-ATION.
THE GLOW IS SEEN TO FLARE BRIGHTER.
IT BUILDS, AS IF MOUNTING TOWARD SOME SILENTLY FURIOUS CRESCENDO OF LIGHT.
BUT WAIT! THERE ARE SOUNDS NOW, AS WELL. RAUCOUS, URGENT SOUNDS -- SOUNDS FRIGHTFULLY INCONGRUOUS AS THEY ECHO ACROSS THE ICE AND SNOW.
FINALLY, LUMINOUS TENSION STRETCHED TO THE BREAKING POINT, THE LURID LIGHT EXPLODES.
PABLO MARCOS '80
AND THE DENIZENS OF THE DOME STAMPEDE IN PANIC, HOWLING AND SQUEALING OUT INTO THE FRIGID NIGHT.
DOUG MOENCH / WRITER
BILL SIENKIEWICZ & PABLO MARCOS / ARTISTS
JIM NOVAK / LETTERER
GEORGE ROUSSOS / COLORIST
JIM SALICRUP / EDITOR
JIM SHOOTER / EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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Courtesy HeritageAuctions.com

The Fantastic Four #227, page 3 original art
by Bill Sienkiewicz & Bruce Patterson

FANTASTIC FOUR
227
HOW DO I LOOK--? DECIDED TO MAKE THE BEST OF IT AN' GET SOME SERIOUS FISHIN' IN.
BET I CATCH ME A WHOPPER, TOO!
WELL, I'VE MADE THE EXTRA BAGS INVISIBLE AND IF REED DOESN'T NOTICE HOW FUNNY I'M WALKING--
SUE, WHY ARE YOU WALKING LIKE THAT? WHAT'S IN YOUR RIGHT HAND?
I GUESS THE JIG'S UP BEFORE IT STARTS--
-- BUT YOU CAN'T BLAME ME FOR TRYING.
FOUR SUITCASES--? DARLING, WE'RE ONLY GOING AWAY FOR A FEW DAYS -- NOT FOR THE WHOLE SEASON!
SEE--? I KNEW YOU'D SAY THAT, MEN!
HEH HEH. MEBBE GOIN' STAG AIN'T SO BAD.
ARE YOU SURE YOU WANT TO CAMP HERE ON THE SHORE, DR. CARRUTHERS? I CAN LET YOU HAVE ONE OF THE CABINS FOR--
NO, THANK YOU, I'LL PAY YOUR FULL RATES JUST FOR THE RIGHT TO SET UP MY EQUIPMENT HERE.
LOST LAKE
I'LL BE NEEDING A LOT OF ROOM, YOU SEE, AND--
EDWARD--HELP! IT SCARED ME HALF TO DEATH!
JOYCE -- WHAT IS IT? WHAT'S THE MATTER?
A MONSTER, EDWARD! FLYING OVER THE MAIN CABIN! A MONSTER, I TELL YOU!
IN BROAD DAYLIGHT!
AN HOUR LATER, THE FANTASTI-CAR APPROACHES...
THERE IT IS, TORCHIE--LOST LAKE -- DEAD AHEAD AN' DOWN BELOW US.
YEAH...?
NOW MAYBE YOU CAN TELL ME WHAT'S DEAD BEHIND AND UP ABOVE US...

Courtesy HeritageAuctions.com

The Fantastic Four #227, page 7 original art
by Bill Sienkiewicz & Bruce Patterson

227
... WHICH LEAVES THE OTHERS TO HANDLE THE BAGGAGE.
LOOK -- IT'S THE THING! MAN, IS HE UGLY!
YEAH, AND THE BLOND GUY MUST BE JOHNNY STORM! HE'S CUTE!
I HOPE YOU'LL ENJOY YOUR CABIN -- IT'S AN HONOR TO HAVE SUCH CELEBRITIES STAYING WITH US.
HEY, IF THAT'S THE INVISIBLE GIRL, HOWCUM WE CAN SEE HER?
UH, I KNOW YOU'RE HERE TO STUPY THE METEOR THAT HIT THE LAKE, BUT...
... WELL, THERE'S MORE TO IT THAN JUST A METEOR. MY WIFE WAS HALF-SCARED TO DEATH AND... WELL, I JUST WOULDN'T WANT ANYONE STAYING AT MY RESORT TO COME TO ANY BAD --
YEAH, WE'VE HEARD THE STORY BEFORE, PAL. AND IF ANYONE CAN TAKE CARE O' BUSINESS, IT'S US!
SHEESH -- SOME VACATION!
I THINK YOU'D BETTER STAY INSIDE TONIGHT AND READ YOUR COMICBOOKS, FRANKLIN.
ARE YOU SURE YOU'RE OKAY, NOW? YOU SEEMED SO --
I'M OKAY, MOMMY, WE FOUGHT A DRAGON AND WON -- JUST LIKE IN THE COMICS.
NO, FRANKLIN, HONEY, NOT LIKE IN THE COMICS. THIS WAS REAL AND WE COULD HAVE BEEN HURT. YOU MUSTN'T CONFUSE REALITY WITH --
AW SHUCKS, MOMMY, I KNOW IT WAS REAL. ANYBODY WHO DOESN'T KNOW THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN REAL THINGS AND COMIC-BOOKS HAS TO BE GOOFY.
NIGHT:
AND IT WAS DEAD WHEN YOU CAUGHT IT, REED?
THAT'S RIGHT, GIDEON, AND I KNOW WHAT YOU'RE THINKING...
...IT WOULD HAVE BEEN AN INVALUABLE AID TO STUDY A LIVE SPECIMEN.
IF THERE ARE ANY OTHERS AROUND, WE'LL NEED ALL THE INFORMATION WE CAN --
WELL, I'VE GOT A POLICE SCANNER HERE AND I'VE ASKED EVERYONE TO REPORT ANYTHING ODD, NO MATTER HOW --
DR. CARRUTHERS --?

Courtesy HeritageAuctions.com

The Fantastic Four #230, page 18 original art
by Bill Sienkiewicz & Joe Sinnott

"--AND INTO THE NEGATIVE ZONE ROOM... TO OPEN THE PORTAL!"
BLACK ENERGY FLOODS IN TORRENTS FROM THE OMINOUS PORTAL...
...AND, INSTANTLY, THE BAXTER BUILDING AND SURROUNDING AREA IS TRANSPORTED TO THE STYGIAN REALM OF THE NEGATIVE ZONE.
IT WORKED! THERE WAS NO EXPLOSION... NO CLASH BETWEEN THE POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE MATTER...
WHILE, BACK ON EARTH, A GAPING CAVITY OF INK-BLACK NOTHINGNESS FILLS SEVERAL SQUARE BLOCKS OF MANHATTAN...
"... WHICH MEANS EARTH IS SAFE TOO-- MY CONTAINING FIELD IS HOLDING THE TWO ZONES IN STASIS!"
STILL, THE PEOPLE IN THIS AREA WHO HAVE BEEN FORCED TO COME WITH US MUST BE TERRIFIED RIGHT NOW, SUDDENLY SURROUNDED BY THE DARK GULFS OF THE NEGATIVE ZONE... BUT IT COULDN'T BE HELPED...
AND RIGHT NOW, ALL THAT MATTERS--
"-- IS THE SUCCESS OF MY PLAN."
WHAT... WHAT IS HAPPENING?! MY ENERGY-- FLOWING BACK TO ME--!
IT'S WORKING, BEN--THE NEGATIVE ZONE IS FEEDING HIS ENERGY BACK TO HIM!
--RESTORING MY STRENGTH--
--RETURNING ME TO MY FULL SIZE!

Courtesy HeritageAuctions.com

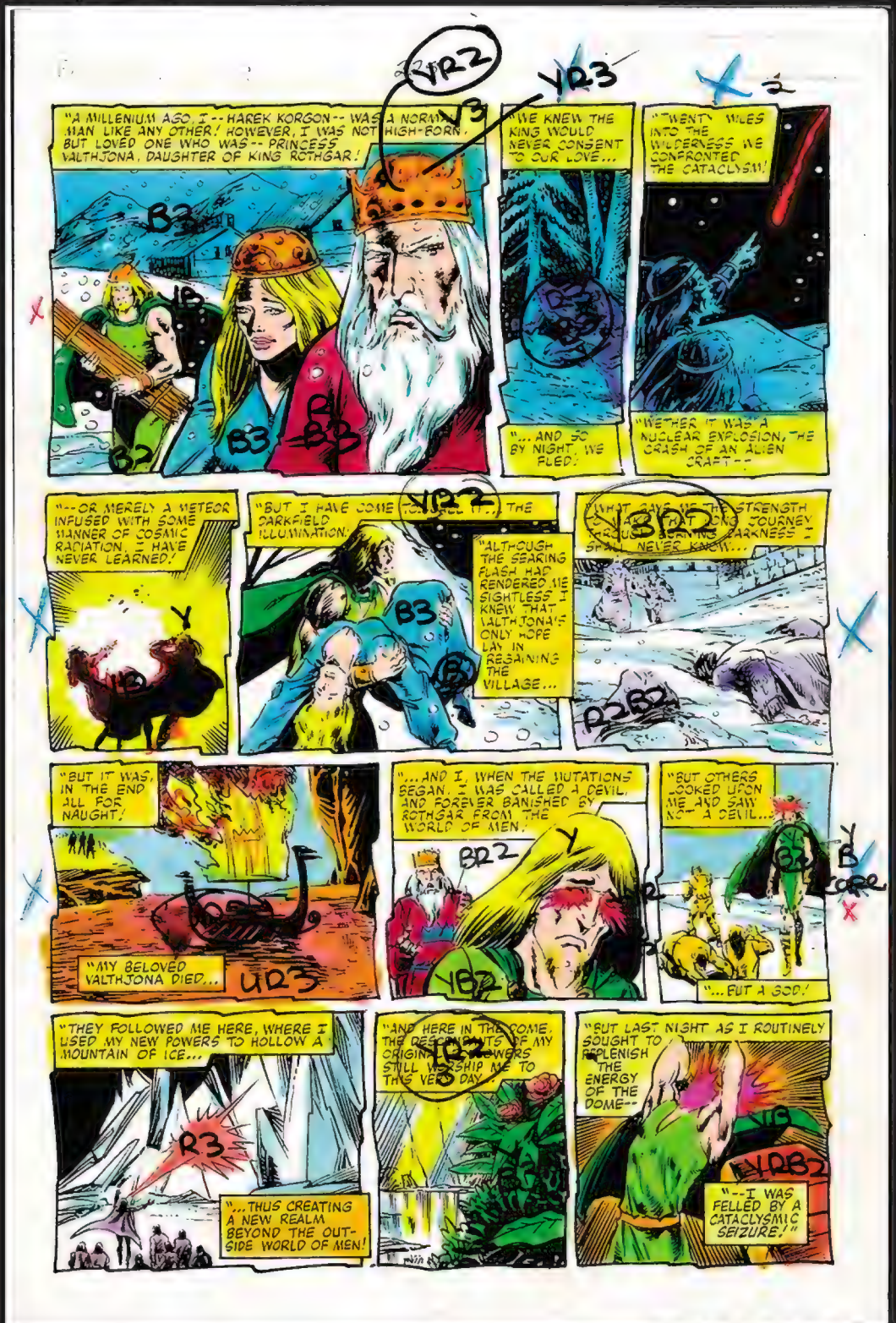
From the 1930s until the late 1980s/early 1990s, Marvel's colorists used a palette of 64 colors to bring the company's characters to four-color life. Take the possible combinations of blue/cyan, red/magenta and yellow ink—with each color screened at 25%, 50% or 100% values—and you'll arrive at all 64 options. (As a key sales tool, covers were lavished with a wider palette and had the option of shades of black referred to as "K-tones.") Color artists hand-painted Xeroxes or photostats of the pages, typically with Dr. Martin's

The Fantastic Four #225, pages 1-3 color guides
by George Roussos

Stan Lee presents: THE FANTASTIC FOUR!
DEEP IN THE FROZEN WASTES OF THE ARCTIC YEAR THE EARTH'S NORTHERN MAGNETIC POLE, THE CRYSTAL DOME OF KORGON GLOWS RED WITH THE SEETHING HEAT OF COSMIC RADIATION...
INSIDE THE ICE-DOME, WITHIN THE GREAT LODGE OF KORGON, THE FABULOUS FANTASTIC FOUR STAND IN SHACKLES PRISONERS OF THE BLIND GOD HIMSELF AND HIS VIKING FOLLOWERS...
I AM DYING, OUTSIDERS, AND WHEN I PASS, SO TOO WILL OUR CRYSTAL WORLD DIE! BUT YOUR PRESENCE HERE MAY PROVE TO BE--A GODSEND!
YOU SEE, I HAVE HEARD OF YOU -- HEARD OF THE FABLED FANTASTIC FOUR AND THEIR VAUNTED EXPLOITS... THEIR MATCHLESS POWERS -- AND IF ANYONE CAN HELP ME... IT IS YOU!
I DON'T BELIEVE IT! THE BLASTED JOKER MUST BE FIFTEEN FEET TALL!
AND THERE'S SOME KIND OF RED ENERGY -- OR RADIATION -- SEEPING FROM HIS EYES!
"BUT BEFORE YOU CAN HELP ME, YOU MUST KNOW WHAT HAPPENED TO ME... FROM THE BEGINNING...
THE BLIND GOD'S TEARS
DOUG MOENCH WRITER / BILL SIENKIEWICZ & PABLO MARCOS ARTISTS / NOVAK, LETTERER Roussos Co. COLORIST / JIM SALICRUP EDITOR / JIM SHOOTER EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
- Roussos

Courtesy HeritageAuctions.com

watercolor dyes, and then coded these color guides, specifying each color value for the printer's separators to follow. The separators hand-cut a different piece of film for each individual swath of a given color value. The codes the colorist and separator used to ensure there was no misinterpretation of the intended colors were: Y for 100% yellow, Y3 for 50% yellow, and Y2 for 25% yellow. R was 100% red/magenta, B was 100% blue/cyan and so on.


"A MILLENIUM AGO, I -- HAREK KORGON -- WAS A NORMAL MAN LIKE ANY OTHER! HOWEVER, I WAS NOT HIGH-BORN, BUT LOVED ONE WHO WAS -- PRINCESS VALTHJONA, DAUGHTER OF KING ROTHGAR!
"WE KNEW THE KING WOULD NEVER CONSENT TO OUR LOVE...
"... AND SO BY NIGHT, WE FLED!
"TWENTY MILES INTO THE WILDERNESS WE CONFRONTED THE CATACLYSM!
"WETHER IT WAS A NUCLEAR EXPLOSION, THE CRASH OF AN ALIEN CRAFT --
"-- OR MERELY A METEOR INFUSED WITH SOME MANNER OF COSMIC RADIATION, I HAVE NEVER LEARNED!
"BUT I HAVE COME TO SELL IT... THE DARKFIELD ILLUMINATION!
"ALTHOUGH THE SEARING FLASH HAD RENDERED ME SIGHTLESS I KNEW THAT VALTHJONA'S ONLY HOPE LAY IN REGAINING THE VILLAGE...
"WHAT GAVE ME THE STRENGTH TO ENDURE THAT LONG JOURNEY THROUGH BURNING DARKNESS I SHALL NEVER KNOW...
"BUT IT WAS, IN THE END ALL FOR NAUGHT!
"MY BELOVED VALTHJONA DIED...
"...AND I, WHEN THE MUTATIONS BEGAN, I WAS CALLED A DEVIL, AND FOREVER BANISHED BY ROTHGAR FROM THE WORLD OF MEN!
"BUT OTHERS LOOKED UPON ME AND SAW NOT A DEVIL...
"...BUT A GOD!
"THEY FOLLOWED ME HERE, WHERE I USED MY NEW POWERS TO HOLLOW A MOUNTAIN OF ICE...
"...THUS CREATING A NEW REALM BEYOND THE OUTSIDE WORLD OF MEN!
"AND HERE IN THE DARK, THE DESCENDANTS OF MY ORIGINAL FOLLOWERS STILL WORSHIP ME TO THIS VERY DAY...
"BUT LAST NIGHT AS I ROUTINELY SOUGHT TO REPLENISH THE ENERGY OF THE DOME--
"--I WAS FELLED BY A CATACLYSMIC SEIZURE!"

Courtesy HeritageAuctions.com

When color artists like George Roussos coded YR3B2 for Mr. Fantastic's hair, the separator knew to set the screens at exactly 100% yellow, 50% red/magenta and 25% blue/cyan. Today, "reading" high-resolution scans of the printing screens (the lines of color dots seen in the original comics' printing) allows restoration artists to create new digital color separations, matching the exact original color values and ensuring archival perfection in the *Marvel Masterworks*.

FOUR
3
AND THE RESULTANT ENERGY EXPLOSION FROM YOUR EYES--THE EERIE RED MIST WHICH SWEPT THE EASTERN SEABOARD OF NORTH AMERICA, AND WHICH WE CAME TO INVESTIGATE -- IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DISTORTIONS OF OUR POWERS?
YES! IT IS THE SAME ENERGY WHICH LONG AGO SLEW MY BELOVED VALKYONA, [illegible] AND [illegible] ME
NOW I "SEE" AGAIN--BUT WITH DAMNED EYES BEHIND WHICH NO MAN'S MIND HAS EVER LAIN CAPTIVE BOUND IN HELPLESS TORMENT, GLIMPSING SIGHTS BETTER LEFT TO MAD DREAMS!
I "SEE" YOU EVEN NOW, AND YOU ARE LIKE BURNING DEMONS AGAINST A DARK FIELD OF NIGHTMARE... HELLISH DARK-FIELD ILLUMINATIONS!
I GUESS, IN A LOTTA WAYS, THAT'S EVEN WORSE THAN WHAT ALICIA'S STUCK WITH.
THERE ARE SO MANY QUESTIONS, KORGON. HOW YOU'VE HEARD OF US -- THE ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY YOU HAVE -- HOW YOUR "TEARS" PROVIDE THE ENERGY FOR--
THE ANSWERS MUST WAIT, REED RICHARDS! I AM DYING!
YOU MUST HEAL ME SO THAT I MAY REPLENISH THE ENERGY OF THE DOME AT LEAST ONE LAST TIME! SHOULD YOU SUCCEED, I WILL NEGATE THE RADIATION'S EFFECT ON YOUR POWERS! BUT SHOULD YOU REFUSE OR FAIL -- YOU MUST DIE!
AND THE BLIND GOD WEEPS IN CRIMSON!
DIE?! YA THINK SO, HUH? AN' YOU AND WHAT ARMY'S GONNA KILL US, YA BLASTED OVER-GROWN LEIF ERICSON?!
NO! I KNEW IT WOULD COME TO THIS! WHY CAN'T WE JUST STAY HOME AND BE NORMAL?! EVERY TIME ON A MISSION IT ALWAYS--
EASY, SIS!
HROLF! WIGLIF! SHOW THEM WHY IT MUST BE SO!
FOLLOW US, OUTSIDERS, AND WE WILL SHOW YOU THE SECRETS OF THE DOME!

Courtesy HeritageAuctions.com

BIOGRAPHIES

DOUG MOENCH

A prolific writer over the last four decades, Doug Moench has made indelible contributions to Marvel and DC characters as well as developing his own creator-owned properties. After starting his career as a film reviewer for the Chicago *Sun-Times*, by 1971 he was ready to make his way into comics. Like many other writers of the time, he broke in with a story for Warren horror mag *Eerie*, after which he quickly found a home at Marvel. His initial efforts were focused on Marvel's black-and-white magazine line, including *Rampaging Hulk*, *Planet of the Apes* and *Tales of the Zombie*.

Moench's penchant for writing horror tales led to a long tenure on *Werewolf By Night*, near the end of which he introduced the brooding anti-hero Moon Knight. At around the same time, he and Rich Buckler launched Deathlok in the pages of *Astonishing Tales*. His other major achievement in the '70s was his tenure on *Master of Kung Fu*, a 10-year long saga praised by critics as a high-water mark of that era's comic storytelling.

In the midst of his work on mainline Marvel titles, he and longtime art partner Paul Gulacy developed *Six For Sirius*, a creator-owned sci-fi series on Marvel's Epic imprint; its success spawned a sequel, *Six For Sirius II*. He also co-created and wrote *Aztec Ace*, a popular indie title published by Eclipse.

By the mid-'80s, Moench had moved to DC Comics, where he took firm control of the Batman franchise, writing both *Batman* and *Detective Comics* for four years. Other DC highlights included *Mister Miracle*, *The Wanderers*, *Omega Men* and several highly regarded *Elseworlds* graphic novels. In the '90s, he returned to Batman for a seven-year run, after which he took on *Catwoman*. His most recent credit for Marvel was *Master of Kung Fu: Hellfire Apocalypse*, a 2003 limited series that reunited him with longtime art partner and *MOKF* alum Gulacy.

BILL SIENKIEWICZ

A multi-media talent, and one of comic arts' most innovative stylists, Bill Sienkiewicz achieved fame during the '80s as a penciler, inker and writer who fearlessly pushed creative boundaries. His first professional credit was for Marvel drawing Doug Moench's Moon Knight in the pages of the black-and-white magazine *Hulk*, where his moody, Neal Adams-influenced pencils were a perfect fit for the "dark-of-night" crime-fighter. After introducing himself to Marvel's core comic readership with cover illustrations for *Spider-Woman* and interior pencil breakdowns in *Fantastic Four*, Sienkiewicz reunited with Moench to launch the first monthly *Moon Knight* title. As the series evolved over the next three years, so too did Sienkiewicz's art, resulting in an expressive and psychological style that redefined the possibilities for super-hero comics. This came to its popular zenith with *The New Mutants*, where Bill took over a title with a straightforward aesthetic and turned it on its head with his enigmatic figurework and often mind-bending layouts. He was rewarded with critical and fan acclaim and enjoyed a two-year run as the title's main artist.

His career now white-hot, he brought his talent as a painter to bear on *Daredevil: Love and War* graphic novel and the Eisner-nominated six-issue miniseries *Elektra: Assassin*. He also wrote and illustrated the psychological thriller *Stray Toasters* for Marvel's Epic imprint and collaborated with Alan Moore on *Brought to Light* and *Big Numbers*. These achievements trademarked Sienkiewicz's frenetically lush style of art and made him one of the most popular artists of the decade. The '90s saw Sienkiewicz take his artistry to other mediums, including film storyboards, album covers, magazine publishing and collectible cards. His work on the seminal biography *Jimi Hendrix, Voodoo Child*, is perhaps his most stunning achievement to date. Of late, he has returned to the comic industry, lending his inimitable talents to the field that first inspired him.

JOHN BYRNE

With his naturalistic style captivating legions of fans, John Byrne became one of the most influential and popular comic artists of the '70s and '80s. Born in England but raised in Canada, with four years of art school training under his belt, Byrne headed straight for the comics business, getting his start with Charlton Comics.

He produced his first original creations, the robot Rog-2000—which appeared as a backup strip in *E-Man*—and *Doomsday +1* at Charlton. Though the art was rough compared to his later standards, it drew the attention of Marvel Comics, where he found work on *Champions*, *Iron Fist* and *Marvel Team-Up*. The relationship he established on these books with writer Chris Claremont led to his entry on a title that was rapidly ascending in importance at Marvel: the "All-New, All-Different" *X-Men*.

Taking the torch from Dave Cockrum, for the next five years Byrne penciled and co-plotted the adventures of Marvel's mutants. His fresh style translated perfectly to the new cast of characters, and together Byrne and Claremont built the X-Men into a keystone title at Marvel. However, just after the twin triumphs of "The Dark Phoenix Saga" and "Days of Future Past," Byrne left the book.

His next major achievement was a long run as writer/artist on *Fantastic Four* that restored the title to its imaginative best.

His run hearkened back to the glory days of Lee and Kirby and is arguably the milestone achievement of his career. Other high points in his early '80s Marvel work included "War and Remembrance," a bracing set of Captain America stories with Roger Stern and *Alpha Flight*, a team of Canadian heroes written and drawn by Byrne.

Next, Byrne headed to DC Comics to revive the flagging Superman franchise with a reset of the Superman mythos that was enormously popular at the time and is still hailed as a masterpiece decades later. After two years helming Superman, Byrne returned to Marvel to work on a diverse set of books including the New Universe's *Star Brand*, the irreverent *Sensational She-Hulk* and the high-tech adventures of Iron Man. In the 1990s, Byrne launched his creator-owned series *Next Men*, scripted the first issues of Mike Mignola's *Hellboy* and delivered the goods for both Marvel and DC on numerous titles. Today, the implacable Byrne continues to write, draw and preside over a popular website. He was inducted into the Eisner Hall of Fame in 2015.

AL MILGROM

Though arguably his highest profile in comics came as the fan-favorite editor of *Marvel Fanfare*, Al Milgrom has made significant contributions as a penciler, inker and writer over his four decades in the industry. Al came up in the '70s both assisting the legendary artist Murphy Anderson and later serving as one of Neal Adams' Crusty Bunkers art squad, in the meantime having his early work published at Charlton Comics, Atlas/Seaboard, Warren and the indie sci-fi anthology *Star*Reach*. His first major inroads in the industry occurred with Marvel, where he followed up Jim Starlin for a long run drawing *Captain Marvel*. Continuing with the sci-fi themes of his seminal creative efforts, he also drew the ongoing adventures of the Guardians of the Galaxy in *Marvel Presents*. At DC, he would develop Firestorm with Gerry Conway. In 1982, Marvel launched the anthology title *Marvel Fanfare*, which often featured Milgrom's editorial notes in cartoon form under the moniker "Editori-Al." While editing that long-running series, Milgrom also had ongoing stints penciling *The Avengers* and *West Coast Avengers* and drew the notable miniseries *Secret Wars II* and *Kitty Pryde & Wolverine*. He also scripted *Spectacular Spider-Man* and *Incredible Hulk*. Since the '90s, Milgrom has spent most of his time inking, with an impressive nine-year run on *X-Factor* and work for Archie amongst his many credits.

GEORGE PÉREZ

George Pérez's intricately detailed style and incomparable ability at drawing team books has made him one of comics' most popular artists. Like many of his early-'70s peers, Pérez broke in at Marvel drawing for their burgeoning line of black-and-white magazines, most notably the "Sons of the Dragon" feature in *Deadly Hands of Kung Fu*. It was there he and Bill Mantlo introduced the Puerto Rican hero White Tiger. His first major work came during the latter half of the decade, where he became regular artist of both *Fantastic Four* and *Avengers* before a move to DC. There he took over *Justice League of America* from the late, long-running artist Dick Dillin, but it was a Marv Wolfman-scribed revival of DC's team of teen super heroes, *New Teen Titans*, that was a huge hit, owing especially to Pérez's evocative character designs and masterful line. He would work with Wolfman on the book for over six years. During this time the duo also helmed the epic miniseries *Crisis on Infinite Earths*, featuring the deaths of classic heroes like the Flash and Supergirl.

In 1987, he broadened his creative credentials with his first regular writing gig on *Wonder Woman*, a title he would also draw for the better part of five years. A return to Marvel in 1998 produced a chart-topping revival of *Avengers* with writer Kurt Busiek. This led the creative tandem to the popular DC/Marvel cross-company miniseries *JLA/Avengers*. His most recent credits include a 10-issue run drawing DC's *Brave and the Bold*, and a stint as writer/artist of a new *Superman* series.

JOE SINNOTT

Born in 1926 in Saugerties, New York, Joe Sinnott spun his childhood love of comic strips into a career as one of the defining artists of Marvel Comics' formative years. Attending New York's Cartoonists and Illustrators School on the G.I. Bill, Sinnott apprenticed under artist Tom Gill and broke into the field in 1951 at Atlas.

Though most widely known to Marvel fans as an unparalleled inker, Sinnott began his career as a complete pencil/ink artist on Westerns (*Arrowhead*), war features (*Battle*, *Marines In Action*), and especially horror/mystery comics (*Journey Into Mystery*, *Strange Tales*, *Menace*). As one of the handful of artists Stan Lee brought back after the 1957 Atlas implosion, Sinnott continued illustrating fantasy/mystery, war and romance stories as well as a short 1963 run on Thor in *Journey Into Mystery*. Meanwhile, he produced numerous romance stories for Charlton and work for Dell between 1959 and his 1965 return to Marvel.

Now back at Marvel and almost exclusively dedicated to inking, Sinnott's style quickly gained the acclaim of Marvel readers. Joining Stan Lee and Jack Kirby on *The Fanastic Four*, he ensured that the tag "The World's Greatest Comics Magazine" was no empty hype. From his debut on issue #44, he inked nearly every issue of *Fantastic Four* until #232, an amazing run of creative continuity.

Sinnott worked prolifically into the 1990s: *Avengers*, *Defenders*, *Thor*, *Rom* and *The Thing* were just a few of the many titles that received the benefit of his slick, refined inking. Now in

retirement, Sinnott enjoys the adulation and respect of comics professionals and fans alike for his years of excellent and dedicated work behind the drawing boards at Marvel.

ROGER STERN

Born in Noblesville, Indiana, in 1950, Roger Stern was a self-professed "child of the '50s," immersing himself in pop culture icons like Lucille Ball, the Lone Ranger, and especially Superman. After graduating from Indiana University, Stern worked at Indianapolis' WXLW radio and formed a comic fan collective with fans in the region. Stern teamed with fellow Hoosier Bob Layton to transform Layton's comic sales business into the fanzine *CPL* (*Contemporary Pictorial Literature*). Their efforts led to an offer from Charlton to create the publisher's official fanzine, *Charlton Bullseye*. Soon after, Stern's fandom pal Roger Slifer contacted him with an opportunity to interview for a Marvel staff job. Stern raced to New York to put his passion for comics to the test. He was hired as an assistant editor and in 1975 embarked on an eleven-year career at Marvel. Stern's early editing duties saw him guiding the Avengers family of titles, *Master of Kung Fu*, *Spider-Woman*, and others. He also presided over *X-Men* during the seminal Chris Claremont, John Byrne, and Terry Austin run, and plotted *Marvel Premiere* #50 starring rocker Alice Cooper.

In 1978, he began to take on regular writing work on *The Incredible Hulk* and *Doctor Strange*. His compelling storytelling quickly earned him an audience and turns writing *Captain America* and Spider-Man in *The Spectacular Spider-Man*. The latter title led to his tenure on *The Amazing Spider-Man*, a run regarded by many as second only to Stan Lee's. Amongst their many Spidey highlights, Stern and artist John Romita Jr. introduced the Hobgoblin and a new Captain Marvel, Monica Rambeau. Stern also began a long stint on *The Avengers*, launched *West Coast Avengers*, and returned for another celebrated run on *Doctor Strange*.

When his tenure with Marvel came to an end in the late '80s, Stern became indelibly linked to the Man of Steel with iconic work that included "The Death of Superman." Since then "Uncle Rog," as he is known to his devoted fans, has returned to Marvel to write several series including *Avengers Forever*, *Amazing Spider-Man*, *Marvel: The Lost Generation*, *Captain America Corps*, and more.

TOM SUTTON

Artist Tom Sutton came of age in the '50s, a comics fan inspired not only by comic strip masters like Milton Caniff and Hal Foster but also the E.C. "New Trend" artists. While enlisted in the Air Force during the Korean War, Sutton spent his spare time drawing strips for his base newspaper. The quality of his work earned him a position at *Stars and Stripes*, where he served as art director and drew more of his own strips, most notably the war strip *Johnny Craig*, named after the E.C. artist. After leaving the Air Force in 1959, Sutton received formal art training in Boston and later worked in the art studio of fine artist Paul Shapiro. By 1967, he was drawing stories for Jim Warren's black-and-white horror magazines and *Kid Colt* for Marvel. He drew the very first Vampirella story, and helped shepherd the iconic character's development with writer Archie Goodwin. His flair for humor was given full flourish in Marvel's *Not Brand Echh*, which featured stories by him in almost all of its thirteen issues. He also drew a well-regarded run on *Planet of the Apes*. Despite not liking super-hero comics, Sutton's credit list included pencils or inks for The Beast in *Amazing Adventures*, *Sub-Mariner* and *Doctor Strange*. Later credits included DC's *Star Trek*, several Charlton horror comics and work for various independent comics companies. He retired from comics in the early '90s and passed away in 2002.

Biographies researched and written by John Rhett Thomas

THE MARVEL MASTERWORKS

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THE GOLDEN AGE

As the Great Depression wore on and the specter of war hung over America, a new storytelling medium was born: the comic book. Within their four-color pages, larger-than-life super heroes could make short work of America's foes, giving readers of all ages hope for victory against the real-life enemies that faced the United States. At the forefront of this new medium was Timely Comics, a young company staffed by such legendary creators as Carl Burgos, Bill Everett, Joe Simon, Jack Kirby and Stan Lee. These trailblazing talents birthed a vast array of characters that would give rise to the Marvel Universe!

GOLDEN AGE ALL-WINNERS VOLS. 1-4
GOLDEN AGE CAPTAIN AMERICA VOLS. 1-6
GOLDEN AGE DARING MYSTERY VOLS. 1-2
GOLDEN AGE HUMAN TORCH VOLS. 1-3
GOLDEN AGE MARVEL COMICS VOLS. 1-7
GOLDEN AGE MYSTIC COMICS VOL. 1
GOLDEN AGE SUB-MARINER VOLS. 1-3
GOLDEN AGE U.S.A. COMICS VOLS. 1-2
GOLDEN AGE YOUNG ALLIES VOLS. 1-2

THE ATLAS ERA

Seeing super heroes waning, Timely Comics evolved into Atlas Comics and took on a vast new range of genres: science-fiction tales of outer space adventures; realistic war comics; buxom jungle heroines; horror comics that would become the center of a moral panic that rocked the industry; and romance comics for the emerging teen audience. Even the classic costumed heroes of the Golden Age retooled to take on the threat of Communism. From Western gunfighters to crime to horror, the Atlas Era had it all!

ATLAS ERA BATTLEFIELD VOL. 1
ATLAS ERA BLACK KNIGHT/YELLOW CLAW VOL. 1
ATLAS ERA HEROES VOLS. 1-3
ATLAS ERA JOURNEY INTO MYSTERY VOLS. 1-4
ATLAS ERA JUNGLE ADVENTURE VOLS. 1-3
ATLAS ERA MENACE VOL. 1
ATLAS ERA STRANGE TALES VOLS. 1-6
ATLAS ERA TALES TO ASTONISH VOLS. 1-4
ATLAS ERA TALES OF SUSPENSE VOLS. 1-4
ATLAS ERA VENUS VOL. 1

THE MARVEL AGE

In August 1961, change hit newsstands: *The Fantastic Four* #1 did not feature the squeaky-clean heroes of yesteryear. They were real characters placed in extraordinary circumstances. They lived together, they fought among themselves — and sometimes, they even lost to the bad guys. This was more than a change in attitude: It was the beginning of something entirely different — the beginning of the Marvel Age of Comics!

Thanks to the fertile imaginations of Stan Lee, Jack Kirby, Steve Ditko and others, an unending list of heroes followed the FF with ever-increasing acclaim and popularity: the Amazing Spider-Man, the Mighty Thor, the Incredible Hulk, Daredevil, Iron Man and the X-Men, to name but a few. These were the Marvel heroes, born of conflict and a continuous struggle to balance human lives with superhuman responsibilities.

THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN VOLS. 1-19
ANT-MAN/GIANT-MAN VOLS. 1-3
THE AVENGERS VOLS. 1-18
THE BLACK PANTHER VOLS. 1-2
CAPTAIN AMERICA VOLS. 1-10
CAPTAIN MARVEL VOLS. 1-6
THE CHAMPIONS VOL. 1
DAREDEVIL VOLS. 1-12
DEATHLOK VOL. 1
THE DEFENDERS VOLS. 1-6
DOCTOR STRANGE VOLS. 1-8
THE FANTASTIC FOUR VOLS. 1-20
THE HUMAN TORCH VOLS. 1-2
THE INCREDIBLE HULK VOLS. 1-12
THE INHUMANS VOLS. 1-2
THE INVINCIBLE IRON MAN VOLS. 1-10
IRON FIST VOLS. 1-2
KA-ZAR VOLS. 1-2
LUKE CAGE VOLS. 1-2
MARVEL RARITIES VOL. 1
MARVEL TEAM-UP VOLS. 1-3
MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE VOLS. 1-3
THE MIGHTY THOR VOLS. 1-16
MS. MARVEL VOLS. 1-2
NICK FURY, AGENT OF S.H.I.E.L.D. VOLS. 1-3
NOT BRAND ECHH VOL. 1
RAWHIDE KID VOLS. 1-2
THE SAVAGE SHE-HULK VOL. 1
SGT. FURY VOLS. 1-4
THE SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN VOL. 1
SPIDER-WOMAN VOL. 1
THE SILVER SURFER VOLS. 1-2
THE SUB-MARINER VOLS. 1-8
WARLOCK VOLS. 1-2
THE X-MEN VOLS. 1-8
THE UNCANNY X-MEN VOLS. 1-10

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